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Education and Welfare in Professional Football Academies and Centres of  
Excellence: A Sociological Study

Thesis submitted in accordance with the requirements of the University of  
Chester for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Chris Platts

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Up the Owls!

## **Abstract**

A career as a professional footballer has long been regarded as a highly sought after occupation for many young males within the UK and, against this backdrop, since the 1970s increasing attention has come to be placed on the way young players are identified and developed within professional clubs. Particular concern has been expressed over the number of players who, having been developed by professional clubs, fail to secure a professional contract, and the ways in which clubs should help young players safeguard their futures through alternative career training. There, have, however, been very few studies that have analyzed the education and welfare provisions that are offered within professional football Academies and Centres of Excellence, and fewer still that have done this from a sociological perspective. By drawing upon the figurational sociology of Norbert Elias, concepts derived from symbolic interactionism, and existing work in the sociology of youth, the objective of this study is to examine the realities of young players' day-to-day working-lives, the experiences they have of the educational programmes they follow, and the welfare-related matters that arise within present-day Academies and CoE. Using data generated by self-completion questionnaires and focus groups with 303 players in 21 Academies and CoE in England and Wales, the findings of the study suggest that players continue to be socialized into a largely anti-academic culture that has traditionally underpinned the world of professional football, and in which the demonstration of a 'good attitude' and commitment to the more central members of players' interdependencies (especially coaches and managers) dominated all other concerns. Indeed, it was also clear that the deep-seated values players held in relation to the professional game as part of their individual and group habituses were shaped by the figurations into which they were born and had been developed during the more impressionable phases of childhood and youth. Players' welfare needs were significantly compromised by the strong degree of suspicion and obvious degree of mistrust that characterized their relationship with club management, which emanated from players' fears that confidential matters would always 'get back' to others inside the club. This was exacerbated, in almost all cases, by players' observations that they were treated as if they were 'bottom of the club' and whose welfare needs were not generally well understood by those working within Academies and CoE.

## **Introduction**

The failure of the England football team to qualify for the 2008 European Championships in Austria and Switzerland, and their poor performances at the 2010 World Cup, contributed significantly to the already prevailing concern over the perceived decline in the success of the English national team. This concern, which has principally emanated from the media, organizations including the Football Association (FA), Football League (FL) and Premier League (PL), and others within the game, has tended to focus on three issues. The first relates to the alleged impact that the growing numbers of ‘foreign’ (that is, non-national) players playing in the English leagues, but particularly in the Premier League, is having on the standard of the English game (J. Wilson, 2007; P. Wilson, 2008). The second area of concern, which is closely related to the first, focuses on the extent to which the growing influx of non-national players is limiting significantly the opportunities that are available for English players (especially younger players) to play in the first team at their clubs (Alexander, 2008; Slater, 2007). And the third issue focuses on the apparent shortcomings of the youth Academy and Centres of Excellence (CoE) system that operate in many clubs in producing a consistent flow of young talented English players who can play at the highest level (Magowan, 2010; McNulty, 2010; Sinnott, 2008; Wallace, 2010). Although concern over the relative success or failure of English football teams and the impact of ‘foreign’ players on standards of the ‘English’ game can be traced back to the 1970s, these issues are currently of particular interest, in policy terms, especially for the FA. This is clear from the comments of the FA’s current Director of Football Development, Sir Trevor Brooking, who is of the view that ‘English football has been “hugely negligent” in the way it develops young talent’ (as cited in Slater, 2007). In this respect, Brooking – whose comments came after the recommendations of the Burns review (The FA) and Lewis report (Lewis, 2007) that the

youth system required urgent review – has claimed ‘radical change is needed’ within Academies and CoE. This was because, he argues, in comparison to other nations such as Spain and the Netherlands, the English system was is not perceived to be ‘producing the depth of players at the top level with the necessary technical skills now required by the major clubs and international teams’ (as cited in Conn, 2009).

What is particularly notable about the current concern that has come to be expressed over the need to enhance the efficacy of the Academy and CoE system is that attention has focused almost exclusively on the twin concerns of the physical development of players and the ability of clubs to produce English players of the required talent (Platts & Smith, 2009). Rather less attention, however, has been given to issues related to the education and welfare provisions that are available to young players who work in Academies and CoE and the role these have in protecting young players’ future well-being should they fail to gain a professional contract. This is particularly surprising given the concerns that have been expressed over the number of young players who, because of the competitive market that surrounds gaining a professional contract in football, fail to make a career out of the game. Indeed, James (2010), for example, has suggested that:

The statistics are damning. The Premier League and Football League say between 60% and 65% of the 700 or so scholars taken on each year are rejected at 18. Even half of those who do win a full-time contract [at 18] will not be playing at a professional level by 21.

In view of the high proportion of players who are not offered a professional contract at age 18, the Chief Executive of the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA), Gordon Taylor, has claimed that 'if it was a university of football, with our success rates we'd have been closed down by now because it's just not good enough' (James, 2010).

Notwithstanding the aforementioned criticism of the youth system in football, the FA, PL, FL, and PFA repeatedly draw attention to the alleged benefits of the Apprenticeship in Sporting Excellence (ASE) programme. The ASE programme is currently organized by Premier League Learning (PLL) and League Football Education (LFE), and provided by clubs, with the aim of promoting young players' 'all round education', for these organizations are of the view that the objective of the Academies and CoE is not solely to produce football players for the first team (e.g. LFE, 2009; Premier League, 2010). By virtue of running an Academy or CoE, a club is required to meet a number of criteria, including those that relate to educational provision for the young players and to safeguarding their rights and well-being (The FA, 1997). In line with these criteria, the FA claim that 'the advent of Football Academies has seen the mandatory appointment of a full-time Education and Welfare Officer to each [Academy]' (The FA, 2007). The tendency for the education and welfare of players to get lost in the debate over the operations of Academies and CoE is also particularly significant for, as discussed in Chapter One, in the context of professional football young players are frequently socialized into 'what is often an abusive and violent workplace' (Kelly & Waddington, 2006, p. 149) where the welfare of players may be compromised significantly by the aggressive, tough, masculine, and at times violent, subculture that tends to surround the game (Brackenridge, Pitchford, Russell & Nutt, 2007; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Roderick, 2006).



Although the ASE programme (reviewed in more detail in Chapter One) was introduced in 2004, there remain very few academic, specifically sociological, studies that have systematically explored the impact the programme is having on the players who are expected to undertake it as part of their scholarship or apprenticeship aged 16-18-years-old. There are still fewer studies that have attempted to understand the views and experiences players have of the welfare and educational components of the programme, and whether these are being implemented, by clubs, as intended by the LFE and PLL. Given the growing social significance of, and importance placed upon, football and youth player development within England and Wales, ‘it is hard to think of a professional sporting practice that has been so mythologized and so little researched by social scientists’ (Roderick, 2006, p. 4) as professional football, and especially the needs and working-lives of youth footballers. Instead, the focus of much popular, and academic, work in these areas has typically been on the game’s ‘social, financial and prestigious benefits, the various components of which are predominantly framed amidst idyllic and somewhat masculine conceptions of fame, affluence and glamour’ (Parker, 1996, p. 71), including at youth level.

Of the sociological studies that have so far been conducted into football, these have tended to examine aspects of the professional game (e.g. Kelly & Waddington, 1996; McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Roderick, 2006; Roderick, Waddington & Parker, 2000), whilst those that have explored young players’ experiences have focused invariably on ‘single issues’ such as education (e.g. Bourke, 2003; Monk, 2000; Monk & Olsson, 2006), identity (Brown & Potrac, 2009), managerial control (Cushion & Jones, 2006; Kelly & Waddington, 1996), and wider welfare issues (e.g. Brackenridge *et al.* 2007). It is Parker’s (1996) ethnographic study of young players’ experiences of their apprenticeships in the early 1990s, however, which

remains the leading sociological study of youth football despite being conducted over twenty years ago.

But what do we stand to learn, sociologically, from studying the lives of young aspiring professional footballers? To what extent can work from the sociology of youth help us to make more adequate sense of the lives of young footballers? And what, if anything, can be understood about the lives of young people more generally from this study located within the sociology of sport? This study seeks to address these issues by answering three research questions. First, how can we begin to examine sociologically the accounts players give of the realities of their day-to-day working-lives, the experiences they have of the educational programmes they follow, and the welfare-related matters that arise within present-day Academies and CoE? Second, informed by the figural sociology of Elias (1978, 2001), concepts from symbolic interactionism, and existing work in the sociology of youth (e.g. Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, 2009; Heinz, 2009; Roberts, 1996), to what extent is it possible to make adequate sociological sense of young players' views and experiences of education and other welfare issues by locating these within the social networks of interdependencies in which players are bound up, and in which they are constrained to think and act in largely unplanned, but also intended, ways (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom, 1977; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998)? Third, to what extent is it possible to make an original contribution to existing knowledge in the sociology of football by exploring the complex interrelationships between players' lives inside and outside of the club as aspects of their lives 'in the round', and not as isolated processes?

Perhaps the first point worthy of note is that, at the time of writing, the study of young people's lifestyles not only within sociology, but in the other social sciences, too, there exist two opposing and mutually disadvantaging tendencies. On the one hand there is a tendency for those with an interest in the sociology of sport to focus upon the football-specific aspects of young players' lives without examining, to any great degree, the complex interrelationships that exist between these, and other, equally significant aspects of their lifestyles, including their leisure lives (e.g. Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2012; McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Monk, 2000; Monk & Olsson, 2006). On the other hand, there is a parallel tendency among sociologists of youth to largely ignore the sporting aspects of young people's lives in favour of examining, for example, key life-transitions (e.g. from school-to-work, marrying, becoming parents) (e.g. Furlong & Cartmel, 2009; Heinz, 2009; Wyn, 2009; MacDonald, 2011) and the youth life-stage as increasingly de-standardized, unpredictable and prolonged (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009; Geldens, Lincoln and Hodkinson, 2011; Roberts, 1996, 2006; Wyn & White, 2002). This undoubtedly reflects the particular research interests of those within the field and the degree to which the sociology of sport, and the sociology of youth, have each developed to become established sub-disciplines within sociology. By drawing upon both these areas of research, however, as sociologists we have the potential to advance our understanding of how the lives of a particular group of young people – young footballers – can be better understood in the context of the transitions they make from school-to-work during the inherently transitional life-stage of youth. In this regard, the present study held out the possibility of exploring the extent to which young players negotiate the life phase of 'youth' in similar, or different, ways to other young people as they enter a rather different employment environment: the adult world of professional football.

It has also been argued that whilst typically incorporating young people aged 16-25-years-old (Roberts, 2006), 'youth is an age that is both ambiguous and ill defined' (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2009, p. 22). This is principally because of a gradual blurring of the boundaries between different life-stages where moving from childhood into youth, and then on to young adulthood, for example, has become less associated with the age of a person and more expressive of individual decisions set in the context of ever-changing relationships characteristic of young people's lives (Heinz, 2009). In the context of professional football, however, the age of a young person is typically used as a marker of their status and this comes to impact on their ability to negotiate the constraints to which they are subject within their relational networks. In this regard, the lives of young players may, in some respects, be different to other young people, for age 16 is typically the point at which players are recruited to clubs to commence their scholarship or apprenticeship regardless of the life-stage they have reached thus far. By drawing on the concept of transitions, and other dimensions of 'youth's new condition' (Roberts, 1996), the researcher in this study also had the opportunity to examine the particular life experiences and circumstances recalled by young people as they were entering the youth life phase that was structured in age-related ways. Finally, it is clear that the ways in which the transitions young people make from education into employment, for example, are often now experienced differently for many young people in the twenty-first century than in previous decades (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007, 2009; Roberts, 2006). This study, therefore, provided the opportunity of shedding new light on the social processes involved by exploring the ways in which young people managed the expectations on them to pursue educational qualifications, whilst also meeting the other obligations of their full-time occupations.

## **Thesis structure**

Chapter One of the thesis reviews the existing literature that has examined some key aspects of the culture of professional football that have been associated with the game since the nineteenth century. In particular, the chapter highlights how elements of the working-class culture that surrounds the game is typically expressed in the development of a rough, tough, masculine environment that is characterized by traditional forms of managerial control, authoritarianism, and unequal power relations between managers and players (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2012; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006). This environment, it is argued, encourages players to attempt to develop a ‘good attitude’ (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000) by, among other things, sacrificing their own well-being for the good of the team and accepting without question the views or advice of their coaches and managers. The chapter also explores the ways in which these traditional working-class sub-cultural expectations come to impact on young players’ welfare and their experiences of education, which are contextualized within a series of broader social processes including ‘youth’s new condition’ (Roberts, 1996) and associated changes in youth lifestyles and transitions (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2011; Roberts, 2006).

Chapter Two then outlines the various ‘sensitizing concepts’ that were employed throughout the study to help develop a more adequate understanding of how young players within Academies and CoE at professional football clubs come to assemble their lives in the way they do. In particular, the chapter examines the key assumptions and concepts of the main sociological perspective that informs the study – figurational sociology – as well as other sociological concepts derived from symbolic interactionism that complemented the analyses presented. The ways in which these theoretical assumptions and concepts underpinned the selection of self-completion questionnaires and focus groups as the two most appropriate

research methods to generate data for this study is then presented in Chapter Three. This chapter describes the practical aspects of the research by outlining the procedures used to recruit the clubs and players for the study, the process of administering the self-completion questionnaires and undertaking the focus groups, and concludes by explaining how the data were processed and analyzed.

In Chapter Four, data generated by the self-completion questionnaires and focus groups are used to examine the processes associated with the ways in which young players were socialized into demonstrating the importance, at all times, of a 'good attitude' to their coaches and managers if they were to improve their chances of gaining a professional contract. The chapter also explains how young players continually attempted to demonstrate to significant others their willingness to undertake, without question, menial jobs, sacrificing friendship groups, and accepting financial and physical fines when they transgress the accepted standards of behaviour and 'social rules' (Goffman, 1961) established by the club. Of particular significance, it is claimed, were the constraints on players to avoid the stigmatization (Goffman, 1963) that accompanied being perceived as 'big time' by those who were most central to their interdependencies: managers, coaches, teammates, and whilst they did not immediately recognize it, themselves. The chapter concludes by suggesting that managerial controlling techniques (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2012; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Parker, 1996), which invariably involved the threat of violence as a form of social control over players, were clear examples of the rather unequal power relationships characteristic of the game that players were socialized into accepting immediately upon entry to their respective clubs.

Having examined the culture into which young players are socialized in professional football, Chapter Five explores the views and experiences players had of the educational components of the ASE programme they undertook as part of their scholarship or apprenticeship. As well as outlining basic descriptive data on the education programmes players followed, the chapter argues that the largely negative educational experiences many players recalled in relation to their compulsory schooling, and the ASE programme in particular, were traceable to their personal and group habituses, and to the longstanding antipathy they held towards the process of academic learning which helped develop among them a ‘counter-education culture’ (Parker, 1996; Willis, 2009 [1978]). How players managed the competing demands on them to fulfil their footballing obligations alongside their educational commitments is also examined before reflecting upon how players’ relationships with managers, coaches and teachers helps to make sociological sense of the experiences players recalled in relation to their education.

Chapter Six of the thesis builds upon the data presented in the previous two chapters and considers young people’s views and experiences of several pertinent welfare-related issues that have particular significance for their well-being. In particular, the chapter explores the ways in which the ‘desire’ players have to ‘make it’ as a professional footballer led them to routinely accept forms of verbal, psychological and physical abuse from coaches, playing when in pain or whilst injured, and coping with the problems of living alone away from friends and family. The players’ testimonies reported in this chapter also indicate something of the ways in which they felt constrained to avoid discussing private matters with key members of their interdependencies (e.g. coaches and managers) who frequently perceived players as being at the ‘bottom of the food chain’. This was often because players perceived the disclosure of potentially sensitive and private matters would lead them to be viewed as

not being able to cope with the demands of the game and thus not worthy of being awarded a professional contract.

The Conclusion reflects upon the sociological significance of the data reported in the thesis for understanding the realities of players' lives. In particular, the study concludes that despite changes in policy over the past 30 years or so, there remains an anti-academic culture within Academies and CoE and the sub-cultural expectations to which players have to adapt may compromise the welfare of those players. The practical value that the research presented in this thesis may have for policy formation are then considered before possible future areas for research are identified.



## Chapter One

### **Literature Review**

The Introduction outlined some key aspects of the current concern about the perceived inadequacies of the youth Academy and CoE system in England and Wales in preparing young players for a career both inside, and outside, of professional football. In particular, it was suggested that the system does not produce enough players of the required talent to compete for professional contracts at leading professional clubs and, in this context, questions have been raised about the efficacy of education and welfare provisions in catering for those who fail to gain a professional contract at the end of their scholarship or apprenticeship. The central objective of this chapter is to review the available literature on: (i) young players' experiences of working within professional football; (ii) the educational provisions available to players; and (iii) players' experiences of education within the traditional anti-academic environment of professional football. In doing so, it is argued that to adequately understand the views and experiences expressed by young people, it is essential to locate these within a broader context, and specifically within the sub-cultures that have traditionally surrounded the game.

#### **Professional football as a working-class industry**

Since the development of the professional game in the nineteenth century, and its emergence in one form or another from the public schools of England (Dunning & Sheard, 2005), professional football has been largely associated with the working classes, rather than middle or upper class groups in the wider society (Dunning & Sheard, 2005; Wilson, 2002). Football, it has been claimed, is frequently regarded as playing a central role in the identities of many

people globally, particularly because of its popularity among traditional working-class groups (Ward & Williams, 2010). In addition, despite the changing economic circumstances of professional players in comparison to the supporters of the game (Roderick, 2006) following the abolition of the maximum wage in 1961 (Platts & Smith, 2010; Roderick 2003), the introduction of the Premier League in 1992 (Banks, 2003; Conn, 2005; King, 1998), and the Bosman ruling of 1995 (Simmons, 1997), for example, many players have their social roots in working-class communities. Based on their research with players in Scotland, for example, McGillivray, Fearn and McIntosh (2005, p. 111) 'produce a clear picture of a population of Scottish professional footballers emerging predominantly from lower income, working-class communities', while Parker (1996, p. 1) has described professional football in England as 'distinctively working-class occupational domain'.

The working-class sub-culture that typically surrounds professional football is perhaps most clearly expressed in the various ways players are controlled by managers. In their study of abuse and intimidation as forms of managerial control in professional football, Kelly and Waddington (2006, p. 156) focus on the working-class characteristics that have traditionally been associated with the game when trying to 'account for the persistence of this arbitrary and authoritarian style of management' that has come to characterize professional football. At the time of writing, one of the most high-profile managers to declare his use of authoritarian forms of social control over his players is Sir Alex Ferguson. Often celebrated as one of the greatest managers of all time having spent over 25 years as manager at Manchester United and winning an unprecedented number of domestic and European competitions in that time, Ferguson has argued that 'control is important, very important. My control is the most important thing' (Sportsmail, 2010). He also claimed that 'if I lose control of these multi-millionaires in the Manchester United dressing room then I'm dead. So I never lose control.

If anyone steps out of my control, that's them dead' (Sportsmail, 2010). Despite the high-profile nature of Ferguson, and in particular his well-known treatment of a number of prominent players during his tenure in charge at Old Trafford, such as Paul Ince (Rich, 2008), Roy Keane (Ladyman, 2011), and David Beckham (McDonnell, 2011), there are other examples of the various ways current managers exercise their authority as a way of maintaining control over their players. Upon leaving Tottenham Hotspur for Aston Villa, for example, Scottish international defender, Alan Hutton, noted that he was regularly ignored by Harry Redknapp, his manager at Tottenham, in 'an attempt to get rid of me'. Hutton claimed that 'the last straw was when I was made to train with the kids for whatever reason – I don't know what that was about, you'd have to ask Mr Redknapp' (Ellis, 2011).

The emphasis that managers place upon exerting control over players as a means of imposing discipline and obedience is neither a modern phenomenon, or something that is isolated to managers who are employed by teams in the PL. For example, in his autobiography that describes his life in professional football, Stan Ternent made reference to an incident that occurred during his time as manager of Burnley in the lower reaches of the FL when he felt moved to discipline players on route to an away fixture in Bournemouth. Ternent recounts how, feeling hungry, he requested one of the tuna sandwiches that had been packed on the coach for the trip, only to find out that 'the greedy gets [players] had scoffed the lot before we were a mile from Turf Moor' (Ternent & Livesey, 2004, p. 213). Describing the reaction of the players during his 'ten minute rant', Ternant said, 'I saw Clive Holt staring open-mouthed as I lost my rag over a sandwich filling, but the wider issue was one of discipline. Running a football team requires order, structure and rules. If players take the piss, they will overrun you' (Ternent & Livesey, 2004, p. 213-14). Similarly, in his autobiography, Roy Keane highlights several ways in which Brian Clough, his former manager at Nottingham

Forrest, sought to maintain discipline and control over players in the dressing room. In the following example, Keane (2003, p. 28) recalls an incident of physical violence with Clough having made a mistake in an FA cup game, which he interpreted and accepted as part of his footballing education, or 'learning curve':

When I walked into the dressing room after the game, Clough punched me straight in the face. 'Don't pass the ball back to the goalkeeper,' he screamed as I lay on the floor, him standing over me ... Being knocked down by Clough was part of my learning curve. Knowing the pressure he was under, I didn't hold the incident against him. He never said sorry.

The level of control displayed by managers and their often authoritarian approach to management is not, however, something that is isolated to the professional game. In an ethnographic study of one professional football club in the Premier League, Cushion and Jones (2006, p. 149) record numerous examples in their field notes that highlight how, in an Academy setting, 'authoritarian behaviour manifests itself through a combination of abusive language, direct personal castigation, and threats of physical exercise by the coaches towards the players' (Cushion & Jones, 2006, p. 149). Moreover, when referring to the level of control displayed by coaches, they claim 'language employed was underpinned by a coaching culture saturated with symbols of domination'. In a similar manner, Parker (1996, p. 73) noted how coaches in his study used 'a mixture of violent and abusive language, direct personal castigation, [and] scornful humour' as a way of controlling their young players.

In order to adequately understand the arbitrary use of authoritarian control at all levels of football it is essential to explore the social roots of the game and, in particular, how the origins of management in the game are expressed in the cultural values, social hierarchies, and employment relations of late Victorian England (Carter, 2004, 2006). As Kelly and Waddington (2006, p. 156) have noted, during this period, ‘within the clubs, the professional players were, in status terms, the equivalent of workers within industry and, like industrial workers, were seen as requiring regulation and control’. The alleged need to regulate and control players’ behaviour found expression in the development of autocratic and authoritarian styles of management that were based around clear hierarchies and discipline where ‘everyone was expected to know their place’ (Carter, 2006, p. 5). It was also the case that many of the values these styles of management were said to characterize centred upon traditional notions of masculinity (Carter, 2006), where characteristics such as mental and physical toughness and strength were especially admired. But if this explains the *origins* of this form of management, how do we begin to understand the continued existence of this form of management in the modern game? As Kelly and Waddington (2006, p. 158) have noted, over the past 30 years or so, professional football clubs have increasingly drawn on ‘rational modes of coordination and control to areas such as ticket sales, marketing club merchandise, and sponsorship and public relations’, but ‘the role of the soccer manager has remained remarkably resistant to these processes’. Indeed, as the generally most powerful person at a football club, the manager is often in a particularly strong position to control players’ access:

not only to improved financial conditions, but also, and perhaps more importantly, to opportunities to lengthen and improve contracts and to gain or confirm playing status and build reputations. (Roderick, 2006, p. 115)

The ways in which the occupation of a professional footballer is celebrated, especially but not solely among working-class groups, distinguishes it from the majority of other traditional working-class industries. Indeed, it could be argued the resources Roderick draws attention to are highly sought after and, therefore, by denying players access to such resources or threatening to withhold them, managers are able to cultivate an environment within which the level of control they retain over players is relatively high. It might with equal validity be noted that the regulations (or lack thereof) according to which aspects of the professional game, especially those of managerial control, are equally significant in this respect. Kelly and Waddington (2006, p. 159), for example, have claimed that:

Limits of the manager's authority, unlike that of most managers in other modern industries, are not clearly defined or limited by formal rules or regulations, but are left largely for each manager to define for himself.

This is especially the case for managers such as Sir Alex Ferguson and Harry Redknapp who have gained a reputation for being 'successful' during their careers by, among other things, managing teams to victory in certain domestic and European competitions, qualifying for European competitions, gaining promotion or avoiding relegation and the number of young players whom they have developed. In this context, the managerial style and rules they impose are rarely called into question because the results on the pitch are taken as evidence that 'he must be doing something right'. Together with the manager's ability to deny players of their aspirations, the lack of regulation or monitoring of managerial style allows managers to impose sanctions on players as they see fit, which is often 'observable in terms of less

favourable treatment and, ultimately, rejection’ (Roderick, 2006, p. 115) of players when managers feel they are no longer required in their squad.

### **Professional football: A working-class shop floor culture**

An additional way in which the working-class culture of professional football finds expression in the game, and comes to impact on players’ experiences, is through the development of what Parker (1996, p. 223) calls the ‘Working-Class Shop Floor Culture’, which is based around ‘masculinity and toughness’ (Willis, 2009 [1978], p. 52). Industries such as professional football where the management structures emerged, intentionally and unintentionally, as expressions of the social stratification system that existed within wider society gave rise to particular cultures specific to the working classes (Kelly & Waddington, 2006). These cultures remain, to varying degrees, in the modern game and exist largely as a:

whirlpool of informal workplace relations predominantly comprising; a strict male chauvinism, a “breadwinner”/manual production mentality, and a coarse sexist humour manufactured around practical jokes, gestures and racist/homophobic connotation. (Parker, 1996, p. 223)

Referring to his ethnographic experiences of one professional club, Parker has suggested that, in the context of professional football, the traditional shop floor culture (Willis, 2009 [1978]) of working-class industries takes on similar characteristics to those outlined above, but focuses distinctively on ‘the stylized adoption of a sexually explicit and often derogatory vocabulary which was ideally characterized by a sharp-pointed form of delivery’ (Parker,

1996, p. 223). Moreover, the purpose of this vocabulary and particular form of delivery, is found in the specific forms of work place humour that exist in professional football and are mostly deployed with the intention of ‘taking the piss’ or ‘ripping’ other people, usually teammates (Collinson, 1988; Parker, 1996). Often described as ‘banter’, Parker (1996, p. 224) argued that this culture revolves around ‘administering verbal “wind-ups” to the point where work-mates failed to cope with the pressures in hand and ultimately “snapped”’. In this regard, Parker (1996, p. 224) concluded that:

In order to accumulate any kind of peer-group credibility, individuals were not only required to “take” the insults of others, but to “give” as good as they got, thereby proving their masculine worth.

In most cases reference to ‘banter’ is said to comprise mostly light-hearted jokes that are not to be treated by the recipients as something serious, though there is evidence that, in certain situations, banter can be interpreted differently and have different meanings (Collinson, 1988). Indeed, for Roderick (2006, p. 72), ‘despite being couched in humorous and seemingly harmless terms, each joke contains a more serious implicit but more generally understood meaning’ among players, especially younger ones who are regularly the butt of the jokes that exist in football clubs. Despite the alleged comical element to the ‘banter’ that is often directed from professionals towards younger players, there is a general understanding that the action of the professionals serves two main purposes: to remind the younger players that they are still ‘bottom of the club’ and, therefore, need to respect the professionals; and, secondly, to socialize youngsters into the environment within which they need to be able to survive if they are to undertake a career in professional football (Kelly & Waddington, 2006). For



example, referring to the time when they were seeking a professional contract, the comments of players in Kelly and Waddington's (2006, p. 155) study indicated that 'if apprentices and young players can learn to handle the abuse, and negotiate what one player called the "not so nice stuff", then they were prepared for anything in soccer'. Similar evidence of the 'grounding' of young players by more established professionals is also available in several autobiographical accounts of retired players. In his book that charts his turbulent life inside and outside of professional football, Andy Morrison, reflecting on his time as an apprentice at Plymouth Argyle, claims that, in his experience, the underlying reasons for the way most professional players treated apprentices was 'to establish a pecking order and we [apprentices] were under no illusions that we were the bottom of the pile' (Morrison, 2011, p. 37). Among a number of examples, Morrison highlights one particular day during his time as an apprentice at Plymouth Argyle when:

One of the first team players ... decided we hadn't done enough running ... We were on the edge of a big hill and he took out the balls and booted them over the fence and down into the brambles into a valley below. "Go and get them you lazy fuckers and hurry the fuck up" he barked ... It was like being a new recruit in the army.

The first few months young players spend in a professional football club are said to be among the most difficult, for the repeated use of banter and its purpose are not generally well understood by newcomers to the harsh realities of professional football who have not yet learnt the sub-cultural meanings associated with it. Writing about his time at Manchester City during the early 1990s, Paul Lake (2011, p. 76) recounted how:

Their [the apprentices] first proper pre-season was quite a culture shock for most trainees, coming as they did from the comfort of school and home ... Those apprentices who turned up with a swagger and an attitude would be immediately earmarked by the older lads for some special attention, particularly if they possessed any distinguishing features. Big noses, bad acne, bowl-head haircuts and bum-fluff moustaches were seen as fair game for the seniors who took great delight in bringing these upstarts down a peg or two.

Using an example from when he was an apprentice, Lake went on to describe how he was ‘teased mercilessly during a communal meal, by our captain, Mick McCarthy, who wedged some pitta bread over both ears and yelled “anyone seen Lakey?” at the top of his voice’ (Lake, 2011, p. 76-7). Despite going ‘scarlet with embarrassment’ in front of the rest of the first team squad, as with all players, Lake emphasizes the importance of engaging in ‘impression management’ (Goffman, 1959) and not outwardly expressing to others that such treatment impacted negatively on one’s feelings and self-image. In conclusion, Lake (2001, p. 77) writes that he did all he could to:

Brush it off, smiling and shrugging until the laughter subsided. But that’s all you can do when you were an apprentice. Batting away such remarks by your superiors was the only viable option, because you’d never have heard the last of it if you’d have had an adolescent strop or – heaven forbid – dared to retaliate.

The working-class shop floor culture that exists within professional football and impacts on the experiences of young players, together with strict authoritarian approaches to management, helps shed light on some of the sub-cultural expectations that youth players are frequently exposed to in the day-to-day routines of their working lives. In particular, the authoritarian and autocratic approach adopted by many managers, the hyper-masculine environment within which players are expected to fulfil their professional obligations, and the hierarchical organization of power, are all central elements of the working-class shop floor culture in professional football.

There are numerous other sub-cultural expectations that professionals and younger players are required to conform to in order to maximize their chances of becoming or continuing as a professional player. Central among these are the expectation that players will sacrifice themselves for the good of the team, play when in pain or whilst injured, and accept punishments imposed if they are perceived to transgress any of the agreed rules or boundaries set by club management. The next section indicates how players have to learn to deal with the managerial structures that surround the game and understand that ‘attitudes of acceptance [and] obedience’ (Parker, 1996 p. 48) are a fundamental part of the shop-floor culture that should, without exception, be accepted without question.

### **Managerial authority and instruction**

The importance of being able to adapt one’s behaviour so that it conforms to that which is deemed socially acceptable in professional football is further emphasized by Cushion and Jones’s (2012) ethnographic study of one professional football club in England. In reference

to what they call the ‘hidden curriculum’ employed within professional football, Cushion and Jones (2012, p. 6) noted that:

Coaches were keen to develop ‘competent workers’ equipped with the skills to do the ‘job’, but they also wanted the players to acquire the values, ideology and cultural capital required of the wider field.

In this regard, coaches seemed keen to stress to young players that part of their job ‘involved the construction of a particular identity, an appropriate habitus’ (Cushion & Jones, 2012, p. 6) developed within professional football and which becomes part of the so-called ‘hidden curriculum’ said to exist in the game. In this context, Cushion and Jones (2012, p. 7) have suggested that the development of an appropriate habitus is of particular significance, for it acts as a:

vehicle for the transmission of a powerful doxic hidden curriculum defining acceptable practice within the context of the field, and consolidating the social differentiation constructed by some agents to impose dominance over others

One of the central processes underpinning the socialization of young players into professional football, and the ‘doxic’ environment outlined by Cushion and Jones, relates to the ways in which players learn to understand that, in the majority of cases, ‘an immediate and unquestioning reaction to official instruction [is] expected’ (Parker, 1996, p. 48), particularly

from managers and coaches. While some of the sub-cultural expectations that exist in professional football are passed on to players through more informal means (e.g. learning from the behaviour of other personnel at the club) – or, in Cushion and Jones’s (2012) terms, the ‘hidden curriculum’ – conforming unquestionably to the wishes of a coach, manager or senior player is typically communicated in rather more explicit terms. Indeed, players are frequently informed verbally by club personnel of the need to adhere to their demands and instructions for fear of placing their short-term and long-term futures in doubt. Parker (1996, p. 48), for example, noted how the club personnel whom he observed in his study ‘stipulated that a lack of individual conformity off the pitch would automatically translate itself into collective team failure on it’, and young players were thus expected to convey their obedience by conforming to these social roles without hesitation. Similarly, the players in Parker’s study were regularly required to undertake various menial jobs as part of their apprenticeships without questioning their need, or purpose. In this regard, Parker (1996, p. 39-40) described how in addition to rudimentary tasks such as cleaning cones, footballs and boots:

First years were compelled to carry out the more general cleaning tasks within the confines of the club. Areas of domestic concern were toilets, dressing rooms, showers, the “bootroom”... weight room, sauna room, “drying room”... and adjoining corridors.

One further way in which club management seek to constrain players to accept without question club rules is through the implementation of fines, or physical punishments, if they are perceived to transgress these in any way. High-profile cases of professional players being fined are often accompanied by a plethora of media articles and analysis surrounding the

players' supposed misdemeanours, which are often used to portray them as an over-indulgent villain whose pampered lifestyle is far removed from the realities of supporters. Perhaps the most recent example of the supposed refusal of Carlos Tevez to play for Manchester City in a Champions League match, for which he was reportedly suspended from the club for two weeks and subsequently incurred a club fine of two weeks wages (Taylor, 2011). Notwithstanding Tevez's case, what is arguably more significant, but which receives far less coverage, is the systematic and institutionalized fine system to which players are exposed to on a day-to-day basis if they are perceived to have contravened club 'regulations' or the standards set by the manager or coach (Kelly & Waddington, 2006). Many players in Kelly and Waddington's study (2006, p. 41) remarked that 'the manager saw financial penalties as a way of hitting them where it hurt most: in their pockets'. What is particularly interesting about the sanctions for which fines are implemented is that, as with many of the sub-cultural expectations in professional football, they are frequently not standardized or regulated but are introduced on the whims or idiosyncrasies of the manager, coach, or even the players themselves. Given that the foundations of the standards expected by a manager or coach is underpinned by their own beliefs about what constitutes acceptable behaviour, rather than a measurable set of criteria, the 'criteria are often applied in arbitrary ways by coaches and managers and can lead to the generation of jealousy among teammates and the issue of managerial favouritism' (Roderick, 2006, p. 37). The 'informal' nature of these criteria are also used to determine whether a young player possesses a 'good attitude', which is commonly regarded as a central characteristic of the 'good professional' (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000). Among other things, young players are faced with the problem of demonstrating to significant others (especially their managers and coaches) that they have the right attitude by working hard and being willing to make personal sacrifices for the team (Roderick, 2006).

## **Sacrificing oneself for the good of the team**

As well as demonstrating an obvious willingness to accept the approach of their manager or coach and the fines and standards they employ is, at least on the face of it, ‘the willingness of a player to sacrifice personal achievement and glory for the good of the team’ (Roderick, 2006, p. 40). In particular circumstances, such as when a player is injured or left out of the team by the manager, there is a sub-cultural expectation that players accept the view that ‘no one player is bigger than the club’, and that they should express themselves in a way that highlights their desire for the team to do well in their absence (Roderick, 2006). While players are constrained to convey an outward impression of compassion and support towards the fortunes of the team, which comprises celebrating and congratulating team members when they win and consoling them in defeat in order to help bolster team morale, in reality many players ‘look out for themselves’ (Roderick, 2006, p. 40) rather than their peers. Roderick relates this conflict of interest to the possible loss of identity players experience when they are not part of the team – whether because of injury or because they have been dropped by the manager – because ‘being a player is not just something that they do, it is something that they *are*’ (2006, p. 17; original emphasis). In particular, he argues that:

As unemployment in general may lead to a diminished sense of self ... likewise, having to watch and not participate in matches may foster a loss of sense of importance as well as high levels of anxiety for professional footballers. (Roderick, 2006, p. 41)

Against this backdrop, where professional players are expected to be seen to be concerned about the team, rather than themselves as an individual, young players are similarly expected

to engage regularly in ‘face work’ (Goffman, 1959). In this regard, Parker (1996) has noted how, such is the strength of the desire among young players to gain a professional contract, many of them develop what he describes as ‘careerist orientations’ that privilege personal interests rather than those of the team. In this respect, the players in Parker’s (1996, p. 110) study were often found to be ‘impression managing’ during their time as apprentices and:

although many individuals explicitly espoused their commitment to cohesive club practice, implicitly a general trend prevailed whereby a number of trainees regularly prioritized their own career needs over and above those of others, and those of the youth team as a whole.

For Parker (1996), one notable area within which this occurred was the decision by many players to hide their injuries from the coaches so they were able to take part in training and matches. Indeed, while many of the players recognized that they would be unable to perform to their maximum and, therefore, negatively impact on the performance of the team (Parker, 1996), they were almost universally more concerned about the long-term consequences of losing their starting place in the team and the impact this might have on their chances to impress coaches and managers. This point merits further attention.

### **Playing with pain and injury**

Over the past 15 years or so, social scientists have made an increasing contribution to the body of research surrounding pain and injury within professional sports (e.g. Nixon, 1992; Waddington, 2011; Young, 1993), and in the UK much of the early work centred upon



football (e.g. Murphy & Waddington, 2007; Roderick *et al.*, 2000). As Young (1993) has noted, the available literature suggests that, in terms of the risk of injury, professional sports such as football are particularly ‘high risk’ and each have their own occupational hazards and forms of ‘industrial disease’. One study of the prevalence of injury among players in professional football in England indicated that, on average, approximately 0.31 formally diagnosed injuries per player each season (Hawkins & Fuller, 1998, p. 326) and since many other injuries typically remain undisclosed by players this is likely to be an under-estimation of the scale of the problem. A similar investigation into academy level players reported ‘an average injury rate of 0.40 per player per season’ (Price, Hawkins, Hulse & Hudson, 2004, p. 468). The study by Price *et al.* (2004) also noted that, over two seasons, players in the Under 18 and Under 19 categories of 38 Academies in English football amassed 1,150 injuries, which does indeed suggest ‘that professional football is a high risk occupation’ (Roderick *et al.*, 2000, p. 166) to which young players are also subject. That young players are expected – and, more importantly, willing – to play with pain and injury was also evident in Parker’s (1996, p. 111) study, in which he explained that ‘it was common also for squad members to play or train-on through injury and pain thereby preserving their position in the next “starting line-up”, and generating increased favour in terms of managerial preference’.

Although young players’ experiences of playing with pain and injury and the meanings this has for them have not been widely studied, research at the professional level of the game has pointed to a number of shared, well understood, meanings that the process of being injured has for players. In their study of professional footballers in England, Roderick *et al.* (2000) concluded that being injured was part and parcel of the life of a professional footballer, and contrary to popular opinion, was something that needed to be avoided wherever possible such was the central value players placed upon playing. Players who were injured, they argued,

were frequently perceived as ‘non-producers’, as not possessing the ‘right attitude’, and as negating their responsibilities to the team (Roderick *et al.*, 2000). In this regard, it is not uncommon for many footballers to seek, wherever possible, to avoid being stigmatized by significant others (for example, their managers, coaches, medical staff, and teammates) and ‘identified as flawed, discredited or spoiled’ (Roderick, 2006, p. 67). Consequently, many players, especially younger ones seeking to obtain a full-time contract, frequently engage in a variety of ‘avoidance strategies’ (Goffman, 1963) that include hiding injuries from others (especially those which are not immediately ‘visible’), ‘playing hurt’ as often as possible in the hope that this will be perceived by managers as a demonstration of their good attitude, and returning to play as soon as possible to avoid being perceived as ‘shirking’ their responsibilities as players (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000). As Roderick (2006, p. 45; emphases in the original) has pointed out ‘it is important ... that players should have, or at least should “display”, an appropriate *attitude* towards playing with pain and carrying injuries’.

The normalization of playing with pain and injury in football, it has been argued, is inextricably tied to players’ perception of themselves as being stigmatized by managers, physiotherapists, and other players, and the threat this poses to their self-identities. In a very real sense, players often experience, on an almost daily basis, a series of internalized and externally-imposed constraints that form a central part of the occupational culture in which *playing* is emphasized, and being injured is perceived as a clear threat to players’ self-identities and place in the team (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000). For young players seeking to secure their first full-time contract, these constraints may be experienced particularly acutely such is the importance of getting ‘game time’ to impress their managers and coaches who will determine their future careers (Parker, 1996).

Thus far this chapter has reviewed the existing literature that examines some key aspects of the culture of football relevant to this study of young people's views and experiences of education and welfare in professional Academies and CoE. In doing so, it has become clear that the dimensions of the subculture that surrounds professional football have deep historical roots that can be traced back to the development of the game in the nineteenth century. As explained in more detail below, however, concerns over the education and welfare of young players only began to find expression in England and Wales during the late 1960s and early 1970s. The next section briefly considers some of the wider social processes identified in the sociology of youth literature that helps to explain the growing societal interest in the welfare of young people, and their changing lifestyles, before reflecting upon the relevance of these for this study.

### **Youth's new condition, education and employment**

According to Roberts (1996), since the 1970s young people's lives have become increasingly characterized by a number of developments that have contributed to what he calls 'youth's new condition'. At the heart of this 'new condition', he claims, are several key changes in the life-transitions that young people currently experience and are constrained to negotiate over the life course compared to previous generations. Firstly, Roberts (1996) points out that when compared to young people in pre-1970s Britain, there is now an increased de-standardization of the life course that is experienced by young people in which the transitions they make (e.g. from school-to-work, marrying, becoming parents) have become prolonged, more complex and unpredictable (Rogers, 2011). Indeed, whilst it is still true that some young people still enter employment at 16 and marry and become parents 'the typical ages at which young adults cross these thresholds have risen' (Roberts, 1996, p. 107). The second feature of

youth's new condition is, according to Roberts (1996), a growing individualization of young people's biographies, particularly in relation to the education they undertake and the jobs in which they are employed (Geldens *et al.*, 2011; MacDonald, 2011; Rogers, 2011). The impact this has had on education and employment is discussed in more detail below, but it is worthy of note that one outcome of the individualization of young people's biographies is that they are far 'more likely to feel personally responsible for their current circumstances and for building their own futures' than formally (Roberts, 1996, p. 108). This is not to say, however, that the increasingly individualized transitions many young people make to young adulthood are made independently of key social divisions (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Heinz, 2009; Roberts, 1996, 2009). Rather, the transitional encounters made by young people always occur in the context of social inequalities related to, among other things, gender, social class, and 'race', which each make an important contribution to their career trajectories (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Heinz, 2009; MacDonald, 2011; Roberts, 1996).

Thirdly, Roberts suggests that, against the backdrop of the growing individualization of youth and the prolonging of the youth life-stage, young people are increasingly subject to greater uncertainty with regard to their future destinations; that is to say, one consequence of youth's new condition is that it is now 'more difficult than formerly for young people to know the types of adults that they will become' (Roberts, 1996, p. 108). The fourth characteristic of youth's new condition is the increasing levels of risk-taking behaviours now associated with young people's lives. Indeed, at its simplest level, young people are unable to avoid risk taking simply by the fact that they are undertaking their transitions in a period when uncertainty in job markets, education, family life and housing are increasing, and there is less certainty in the outcomes of these transitions than ever before (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2011; Roberts, 1996, 2009). Finally, the available evidence suggests that many

young people are increasingly constrained to depend on their families for longer than ever before for things such as housing and income as they make the transitions between youth and young adulthood. In contrast, 'young people without families on whom they are able and wish to depend are at a heavy disadvantage' (Roberts, 1996, p. 108) and are less able to draw upon valuable cultural resources necessary to enable them to negotiate the constraints associated with growing older. In this regard, the developments surrounding youth's new condition has led some to conclude that youth is 'a time of life that is perceived to be the most difficult for individuals with the problem of making the transition from education to work, the problem of "growing up" and the problem of youth culture with its associated moral panics' (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2009, p. 22). But what have been the specific consequences of youth's new condition for the transitions young people make into education and employment? And what is the relevance of this for making sense of the lives of young professional footballers who are required to balance their commitments to education whilst fulfilling their employment obligations in Academies and CoE?

Two central components of youth's new condition, the roots of which can be traced back to the 1970s, have been the simultaneous changes that have occurred in the education and employment sectors and which have had important consequences for how young people lead their lives. Indeed, as Miles (2000, p. 37) has noted, in order to adequately understand the social process of youth there is 'a need to consider what are the two main structural influences on young people's lives: education and employment'. The increasing time many young people spend in the 'youth' life phase has occurred correlatively with their tendency to remain in education beyond the compulsory age of 16 (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Roberts, 1996). In part this is related to a reduction in the number of opportunities available for young people to enter the job market, but it is also related to the increasing recognition among many

employers and employees of the alleged importance of obtaining relevant qualifications (Roberts, 1996, 2009).

It has been argued, therefore, that developments within the education system, which occurred in the context of changes to employment structures, has meant that ‘there is pressure on young people to remain in education so as to secure the most advantageous economic returns’ (Furlong & Cartmel, 2009, p. 121) to such an extent that ‘the completion of secondary education and participation in further or higher education have thus become normative for young people in late modernity’ (Wyn, 2009, p. 98). It has also been the case that whilst qualifications and access to higher education establishments were formerly considered by many as a pursuit for the middle-class elite, ‘nowadays parents and young people from all social classes recognize the advantages, especially in tight labour markets, of entering as well-qualified as possible’ (Roberts, 1996, p. 107). For young people, therefore, one further consequence of the expansion of further and higher education has been a diversification of the routes they take from the beginning of compulsory education to the conclusion of post-16 education, which results in more complex and highly individualized education transitions (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2011; Wyn & Dwyer, 2002). As a consequence, young people now spend a ‘greater proportion of their lives in education, increasingly entering higher education, and enter forms of employment that are very different to those experienced by their parents’ (Furlong, 2009, p. 1).

It is not only the type of job that young people are increasingly reflecting upon, or the route they take to get there, but also the uncertainty that surrounds their career once they gain employment and many young people are increasingly unsure of the extent to which their

education can prepare them for employment in their desired occupations. For young people, and especially those from traditional working-class backgrounds, this is said to pose something of a dilemma. Although never absolute, Roberts (1996, p. 107) highlights that a situation existed in pre-1970s Britain where ‘in many parts of the country there used to be main types of employment into which most males or females, with specific educational backgrounds, would progress’. However, in the face of changes in employment markets, technological advances, the break-up of communities, and changes to education, many young people are now expected ‘to navigate their way in a context in which institutional pathways and structures are not able to provide certainty or predictability’ (Wyn, 2009, p. 97). This is thought to disadvantage working-class young people whose lives are already increasingly uncertain as they take steps that are risky for them (Roberts, 2000). Although many young people (especially from the middle-classes) are increasingly willing to take advantage of the expansion of higher education (at the time of writing attending university is still more likely, in the long term, to provide a better level of employment opportunity compared to people who do not go) this is less likely to guarantee them a career that will be viewed positively than ever before (Roberts, 2006; Heinz, 2009).

### **The early emergence of education and welfare in Academies and CoE**

Before the introduction of Academies and CoEs in the late-1990s, many football clubs trained and developed young players themselves in a rather *ad hoc* manner. This was partly because the training of young players helped clubs manage the financial constraints they were experiencing. These constraints emanated through, for example, wage inflation (particularly after the abolition of the maximum wage and the implications of the George Eastham case in the early 1960s), declining match day attendances, changing transfer regulations and, of

course, the need to remain as competitive as possible on the pitch (Platts & Smith, 2009; Roderick, 2006). During this time however, little consideration was given to the education and welfare of the players (Monk & Russell, 2000).

The first indication that the education and welfare needs of young players at clubs was coming to be taken more seriously by clubs (or so it was alleged) was during the course of 1960s when the FA modified their regulations to allow clubs to enrol players at the age of 15 under the banner of ‘apprentice’ (Platts & Smith, 2009). As Monk and Russell (2000) indicate, whilst there was no formal requirement for football clubs to provide education for apprentice<sup>1</sup> players at this point, the FA insisted that these apprentices be allowed to undertake any form of educational activity they wished. Notwithstanding this apparent pressure from the FA, and later from the PFA, throughout the 1960s and 1970s the majority of clubs seemed to continue treating young players in their traditional way, as a source of cheap labour with little regard for their education, employment rights or well-being (Dabschenk, 1986). Indeed, that young players were seen – in some cases, still are seen – as a form of cheap labour to carry out various tasks around the club meant that their welfare and needs (particularly their educational and future career needs) were not routinely regarded as being particularly important by clubs, let alone seen as a major responsibility (Platts & Smith, 2009). This is not altogether surprising for, as noted earlier, it was only during this period of time that the education and welfare needs of young people in the wider society were being treated more seriously than previously.

In light of the tendency for clubs to neglect ‘issues of alternative career “training” on behalf of both professional and trainee players’ (Parker, 2000, p. 63), growing pressure came to be



placed on the FA and others including the FL and PFA to standardize the ways in which young players were trained at football clubs and to introduce policy and practical measures designed to enhance and safeguard the education and employment rights of players. For a variety of reasons however, in the three decades following the post-1945 period, professional football was characterized by increases in the wages of players and falling attendances at matches. By the beginning of the 1980s, 'the game was seen to be in a state of crisis' (Murphy, 2004, p. 46). The financial plight of the clubs was compounded by the general economic recession of 1979. As Monk and Russell (2000) have noted, under these conditions, many clubs and the lower division clubs in particular, came to see apprenticeships as luxuries that they could no longer afford and, by 1983, only 33 apprentices were employed at fourth division (now League Two) clubs.

Partly in response to these developments, and in a further attempt to enhance players' immediate working rights and their future prospects of finding alternative careers away from football, in the late 1970s, the PFA and the Football League established the Footballers' Further Education and Vocational Training Scheme (FFEVTs) (Dabscheck, 1986). It sought to ensure 'that post-career educational/vocational preparation ... not only [became] a compulsory element of football trainee life, but [also] a heavily subsidised ... feature of professional player status' (Parker, 2000, p. 63). In developing the FFEVTs, the PFA and the FL also attempted to monitor the impact it had upon the educational experiences and welfare of young players. As Platts and Smith (2009) have noted, this in itself was an innovation because, prior to the 1970s, rarely, if ever, does there seem to have been any attempt to evaluate the effectiveness of any policy or measure introduced to improve the educational and related welfare provision for apprentices.

In the same year that the FFEVTS was established, the newly elected Conservative government set out to reduce the high unemployment rates that beset British society and that were making the transitions of young people make from youth to young adulthood increasingly protracted and risky (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2011; Roberts, 1996). Then, in 1983, with the aim of ameliorating youth unemployment, the Conservative government introduced the Youth Training Scheme (YTS) which provided employers with a subsidy if they agreed to provide training for the young unemployed. In the year following its introduction the football authorities adopted the scheme (Stewart & Sutherland, 1996), which provided 'the essential framework that the game had lacked for so long' (Monk & Russell, 2000, p. 64). It is clear that this government initiative was in the first instance aimed at reducing youth unemployment figures. However, it has been claimed that these broader concerns were of little consequence to football clubs (Platts & Smith, 2009). For them, and in particular those clubs in perilous financial circumstances, it offered a lifeline. It helped them to recruit young players and, at the same time, provided some much needed income (Monk & Russell, 2000). In return for YTS funding, clubs were required to release apprentices one day per week to undertake educational courses, though it seems that the courses on offer were limited to leisure and tourism, together with supplementary training in areas relating to alternative careers in the football industry, such as groundsmanship (Monk & Russell, 2000).

At the beginning of the 1990s the YTS was reformed and renamed Youth Training (YT). Its introduction was accompanied by a greater emphasis on the education of players as part of their overall employment rights and well-being (Monk & Russell, 2000), which were becoming increasingly important in the wider society during this period and were becoming characteristic features of youth's new condition (Roberts, 1996). In the following five years or so externally ratified examinations for football apprentices in the form of Intermediate or

Advanced level General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQs) emerged. While the courses continued to centre on leisure, tourism and sport, the move towards more externally ratified awards for players was indicative of a growing awareness of the need to provide apprentices with qualifications that would help them to pursue alternative careers if their ambitions to be a professional footballer were thwarted (Platts & Smith, 2009). Yet, there continued to be variations in the ways in which the clubs administered their Youth Training schemes. It has also been claimed that many young players within football did not ‘buy into’ the YT scheme because of a reluctance to dilute their commitment (or be seen by the club to be diluting their commitment) to their ambition to become a professional footballer, which was often central to players’ practices (Parker, 1996; Platts & Smith, 2009).

### **Education and welfare since the 1990s**

In the mid-1990s the British government expressed serious doubts about the ways in which football clubs were administering the YT scheme that had become increasingly popular among other working-class people in occupations such as plumbing (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007). It seems these doubts were engendered by the belief that the scheme had been devalued by the clubs and that it had come to be considered by a substantial number of the participants as having little intrinsic interest for them (Monk & Russell, 2000). At the same time, on a broader front, the government began moves to shift emphasis away from YT towards Modern Apprenticeships not least because the latter were seen to be more vocationally-orientated and place less financial burden on employers (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Monk & Russell, 2000). By 1998, the Modern Apprenticeship scheme had been rolled out to all FL clubs and became compulsory for every club to adopt (Monk & Russell, 2000). In an attempt to emphasize its academic component, it was named the ‘Football Scholarship’

and was distinctively different from previous approaches to vocational training. One of the changes was a limit placed on the number of funded trainees at each club. Clubs were limited to enrolling 18 trainees in total, at a rate of six per year and any trainees in excess of this number had to be funded by the clubs themselves (Monk, 2000; Monk & Russell, 2000).

One of the possible reasons for this restriction on trainee numbers was that the funding, introduced in the 1980s as part of the YTS, seemed to have had the consequence of increasing the number of apprentice players recruited, but also the number who were released at the end of their contracts (Platts & Smith, 2009). In other words, it does not appear to have encouraged prudent trainee selection on the part of at least some clubs. Indeed, it has been suggested that some clubs might have been rather more interested in the funding that was associated with trainee recruitment than they were in safeguarding the rights and well-being of their young charges. According to Platts and Smith (2009), the new Football Scholarships provided training for three years as opposed to the two years of YT and recruitment of a trainee on to the Scholarship scheme required the club to fund the young player's training for the full three years even if club released the player from their contract after only two. It also required players to undertake 12 hours of academic study per week in a range of public examinations including Advanced (A) Levels, GNVQs and National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs), depending on the grades they attained at General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) level normally taken at the age of 16. In this respect, the Football Scholarship was designed to be more in line with the needs of individual players rather than the 'one size fits all' approach characteristic of the YTS and YT. For example, the more academically able players were allowed to undertake A-Levels, while those with fewer GCSEs at grades A to C were still able to take some A-Levels together with advanced GNVQ (Monk, 2000).

In short, the Football Scholarship was intended to further emphasize to players the importance of undertaking educational qualifications of one kind or another, which by this time had become an increasingly accepted view among those employed in education and employment circles outside of football. However, it is unclear whether these objectives were being realized in practice. Monk and Russell (2000; see also Monk, 2000), who have undertaken some preliminary research, argued that, while a third of the 21 players whom they interviewed were sufficiently qualified to undertake A-Levels – in that they each possessed eight or more GCSE passes at grade C or above, just two were placed on such an academic programme. Consequently, Monk and Russell concluded that, unlike in the education sector more generally, the uptake of A-Levels had not increased in the post-YT era. Therefore, if the aim of the Scholarship scheme had been to increase the academic nature of the educational provision offered by professional football Academies, it did not seem to have achieved its goal. In practice, as will be discussed later, part of the reason is that ‘the academic aspirations of apprentice footballers remain fairly low’ (Monk & Russell, 2000, p. 67).

Around the time that the Football Scholarship was introduced, Howard Wilkinson, the then FA Technical Director, produced the *Charter for Quality*, which in many respects continues to provide the framework for many of the day-to-day operations of the Academies and CoE. In the *Charter for Quality*, Wilkinson made a series of recommendations aimed at improving how young people were trained within professional football clubs, but of particular importance to this study are the recommendations on the education and welfare of young players in which an Academy system ‘distinct from first team management’ (The FA, 1997, p. 17) was mooted. Under this proposal, clubs would receive funding for an Academy or CoE as long as they fulfilled certain criteria set out by the FA. One proposed criterion for awarding Academy or CoE status to professional football clubs was that they should ensure

‘that appropriate and adequate educational provision is available for each Academy player including primary, secondary, further and higher educational provision’ (The FA, 1997, p. 4.7.1). Similarly, for football clubs to have an associated CoE they were ‘required to clearly outline the rules and guidelines concerning Centres with regard to; registration, welfare, educational needs, priority and objectives’ (The FA, 1997, p. 2.15). In these and other respects, the emphasis that the FA placed on players’ educational development and the welfare provisions of which it was a part was indicative of their view that:

Quite properly the player’s match programme should be developed in the best interest of the player’s educational, technical, academic and social needs, by the parents in conjunction with the player’s school and Football Academy Education and Welfare Officer. (Football Association Technical Department, 1997, p. 1.3)

On the formal level, the introduction of the *Charter for Quality* has had a widespread impact and almost all clubs belonging to the PL and FL now run either an Academy or CoE, and many of the proposals outlined in the Charter has since been adopted in the FA’s *Football Development Strategy* (The FA, 2001). However, Trevor Brooking (2007), the FA’s present Director of Football Development, has conceded that the FA does not have sufficient control over what occurs in Academies or CoE, despite its obligation (together with the FL and PL) ‘to monitor, review and evaluate the operation of the Centres of Excellence and Football Academies’ (Football Association Technical Department, 1997, p. 1.3), particularly in relation to the well-being and rights of young players. What Brooking (2007) would like to see is the establishment of a much stronger link between the funding that each club receives for running an Academy or CoE and a range of key performance indicators, some of which

would place a strong emphasis on education and welfare. The concern expressed by Brooking has also been articulated in several publications released since the *Charter for Quality* (The FA, 2005; Lewis, 2007). Reviews of this kind, however, appeared to have very little impact on the way youth football development is run and, despite recommending slight modifications to the *Charter for Quality*, and the recent publication of *The Future Game* by the FA (The FA, 2010) and proposals by the PL for a new *Elite Player Performance Plan*, the system remains similar to the way it was implemented in the late 1990s.

Within the context of this continuing concern, and at the same time as the development and implementation of the *Charter for Quality*, it had become apparent that funding players through a three-year course in whatever subject they wished to study has proven to be beyond the resources of the football clubs and the funding bodies. While clubs receive funding for 18 players, it became impossible for the FFEVTS to cover the costs when players opted for a range of educational programmes that often involved individual tuition or small group teaching. In 2004, therefore, due to the scale of this problem, the FFEVTS was devolved into the PLL and LFE, both of which are presently responsible for the delivery of educational and related aspects of welfare provision in Academies and CoE and other English professional football clubs. An example of this is the ASE programme offered by both organizations. Rather than allowing apprentices to select from a range of different qualifications, the ASE offers players an opportunity ‘to develop footballing skills whilst gaining academic qualifications, which are viewed as essential by today’s employers’ (The Football League, 2010). The ASE framework is made up of three main components: work-based experience; work-based learning; and a technical certificate. In this respect, the work-based experience is carried out at the Academy or CoE and is the ‘on-the-job’ training undertaken by players. Players are also expected to follow up on this work with the work based learning component,

which comprises an NVQ in Sporting Excellence at Level Three. This is evidenced through the completion of a log book, and focuses on players' understanding of, among other things, practical skills, tactics, physical capabilities, attitudes and mental skills, lifestyle management, managing a sporting career, working as a team, and health and safety (LFE, 2009). The players are also required to undertake a technical certificate, which is designed to complement the other aspects of the ASE and comprises the educational component of the ASE. This can be completed by the players whilst undertaking of a Business Technology and Education Council (BTEC) or A-level qualification in Sport (performance and excellence) and is delivered either at a college, by a club-based training provider, or by an club-based 'in-house' provider (LFE, 2009). Depending on the award achieved at GCSE level, players may also be expected to undertake a 'key skills' module, which focuses on these areas and, if the club has time to fit it in, players may also be expected to complete a sporting certificate as part of the ASE framework, although this is not mandatory.

Despite the growing emphasis that has come to be placed on ensuring players receive an 'adequate' education, there continues to be little academic research into the extent to which Academies and CoE are fulfilling their educational remit and preserving the rights of players as workers. The LFE and PLL are subject to inspections from external auditors such as the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted); indeed, in their most recent inspection, the Premier League were awarded 'outstanding' by Ofsted for the 2010/11 season (Ofsted, 2010). In this review, the ASE programme delivered in PL clubs was awarded a rating of 'one' for all aspects including quality of provisions, leadership, safeguarding and subject area education (Ofsted, 2010). This represented a success for the PLL and the Director of Youth at the PL also claimed that should players not gain a professional contract, these results indicate how they 'are very well served for either further education or full-time employment'. In



conclusion, he argued ‘as the report notes, we develop highly rounded individuals for their age’ (Roddy, 2010). But how do players actually experience the education provisions available to them? The next section briefly reviews the limited research that has explored players’ views and experiences of the education programmes they have followed whilst seeking to gain a professional contract.

### **Players’ views and experiences of education in professional football Academies and CoE**

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, it is often reported that only a handful of young boys who fantasize about being a footballer will ever make the professional level of the game, and of those who do, many of them will fail to fulfill a career that renders them financially comfortable for the rest of their life. In this regard, Parker (2000, p. 61-62) has argued that:

footballs’ young hopefuls must seriously consider the wider occupational options that are open to them, preparing not only for the possibility of rejection and failure, but for the ultimate conditions and consequences of life outside their chosen profession.

In the context of professional football, however, it has been claimed that despite the perceived improbability of young players ‘making it’, many of them focus solely on the goal of gaining a professional contract at the expense of pursuing any meaningful long-term career planning and engagement with educational provisions on offer in clubs (Parker, 1995, 1996). In that respect much of the literature in this area has highlighted many players’ so-called “disaffection” towards academic achievement, and the agencies and influences which

impinge upon their overall perceptions of alternative career planning' (Parker, 2000, p. 62). For young players, it seems that education is typically seen as something they have to undertake to fulfill their obligations as a youth player, a point which was emphasized by Parker (2000, p. 62) in his study in which he concluded that:

education was seen by trainees as just one of a host of relatively "trivial" occupational obligations which, together with the day-to-day fulfillment of domestic duties, epitomised the symbolic inferiority of trainee status within the context of club life.

But how do we begin to explain this? In the face of increasing insecurity surrounding their futures in professional football, and the widespread understanding that only a handful of players will go on to make a career in the world of professional football, how can we begin to account for many young players' rejection of educational assistance and post-career planning? Some important clues may be found in Willis's classic study of working-class males in a midlands school in the mid-1970s. Willis (2009 [1978]) explored 'how working class lads get working class jobs' and concluded that one of the most important processes involved was the lads' rebellion against, and rejection of, the rules surrounding education and schooling. In order to establish their own identity the lads in Willis's study distanced themselves from what they saw as the strict authoritarian rules of the establishment as they prepared for leaving school as soon as they could in pursuit of a career among other working-class males. In much the same way, it appears that many young players undertake a similar form of preparation as they enter the final year of their compulsory education. In McGillivray *et al.*'s (2005, p. 113) study, for example, 'nearly two thirds of respondents (64%) had left school by the age of 16, and almost all (93%) had left by the age of 17', by which time

football had come to play a more important role in their lives than their academic studies.

McGillivray *et al.* (2005, p. 113) concluded that:

The picture is not one of a group of young men devoid of academic potential. Instead, a more plausible argument is that academic potential is sidelined in favor of immersion in the footballing dream world where the game shapes the attitudes, behaviors, and responses of its young recruits to the detriment of formal educational attainment.

The findings of McGillivray *et al.* (2005) are not dissimilar to the conclusions of other authors in the area. Indeed, Parker (1995, 1996) also reports players beginning to distance themselves from compulsory schooling in the lead up to the commencement of what was, at the time, a Youth Training scheme. For Parker (2000, p. 62), the general disregard for education was underpinned by the fact that:

A large number of trainees had, in the years leading up to YT [Youth Training] enrolment, disassociated themselves from the process of secondary schooling, investing instead in a form of “anticipatory socialisation” with regards to their desired career goals.

Whilst this research highlights how the antipathy players had developed towards education before they entered professional football Academies and CoE impacted upon their desire to pursue educational studies, there are a number of equally, if not more, important matters that

face scholars once they begin a scholarship. In particular, much of the available literature has frequently emphasized the importance of the sub-cultural expectations surrounding education and post-career planning as pivotal in shaping the players' views of education (McGillivray & McIntosh 2006; Parker, 1995, 1996). As in other areas of the professional game, 'implicit within the context of club culture was the understanding that to succeed as a professional player one had to "think" as a professional player, and that meant "thinking" only of football' (Parker, 2000, p. 67). For many of the young players, however, this often translates into a situation where admitting 'an affinity for academic attainment or to overtly take steps towards post-career planning was, in effect, to admit also to the inevitability of football rejection' (Parker, 2000, p. 67). In view of this, Parker has concluded that 'education and "schooling" represented subcultural metaphors for occupational failure' (Parker, 2000, p. 67). One way in which Parker demonstrates the existence of such a club culture was by reference to the sub-cultural groups that existed in the football Academy he studied. In particular, he argued that 'a subcultural group consensus existed whereby those studying for the BTEC National Certificate were known as "the brainy bastards"... whilst their City and Guilds counterparts were recognised as "the thick cunts"' (Parker, 2000, p. 68), which reinforced the view among the players that to succeed in education was not widely valued within football clubs.

Other research that has examined young people's engagement with educational provisions in clubs has raised questions about the adequacy of the courses on which the players are enrolled, the ways in which they are educated, and the relevance of education courses for their future employability. A key dimension of players' engagement, or lack thereof, are the relationships they develop with their teacher or tutors, who appear acutely aware of the difficult task they face in educating young boys who associate little value in educational

qualifications. Reflecting on the comments of a number of tutors in his study, Parker (2000, p. 70) noted that:

They had traditionally found football trainees extremely “difficult” to teach, describing them as “uncooperative” individuals, who, because they had no respect for anyone but themselves, deliberately set out to be “trouble-makers” and “wind-up” merchants in class.

In the context of questioning how tutors approach the task of educating ‘difficult’ students, Monk and Olsson (2006, p. 434) have also claimed that a more measured approach to the courses the boys are enrolled upon is required. In particular, they claim that their research points to a tendency where:

First year apprentices coming into the scheme were under pressure to study for BTEC courses in sports and related areas. The concern here is that, regardless of their previous academic record, the signals provided by a BTEC qualification in a specific area may well not be in the apprentices’ long term interests.

In view of this, Monk and Olsson (2006, p. 431) went on to claim that:

Football clubs are directing apprentices to do particular vocational training that is of limited use in the general labour market. Given that the return of such vocational

training is of a lower order of magnitude than the return on the NVQ level three academic qualifications (such as the English matriculation examinations, the advanced (A) levels), then this raises concerns about the value of such coercion, from the trainee perspective.

It should be noted, however, that despite Monk and Olsson's findings the education provisions that currently exist within Academies and CoE serve a dual purpose. As Monk and Olsson (2006), among others, have noted, one of the aims of education is to equip young players with qualifications that will be of use to them should they fail to gain a full-time contract in professional football and, with this in mind, they are correct to highlight the limited value the qualification may have. However, one further objective of the ASE is to educate young players in various areas of sports science, coaching and nutrition in an attempt to assist them in developing into better players. In that respect, preparing players for a life outside of football is, for the football authorities, only one part of the education provisions offered in Academies and CoE, which is not considered by Monk and Olsson (2006).

With some notable exceptions (e.g. Brackenridge *et al.*, 2007; Parker, 1996) another element of young players' experiences of the professional game that has been largely under-explored is the extent to which the welfare of players is safeguarded appropriately. Indeed, despite the growing emphasis that has gradually been placed on the welfare of young people in sport and wider society since the 1990s (Brackenridge, 2001, 2007; David, 2005), we currently know very little empirically about young players' experiences of those aspects of the modern day game that impact on their welfare (Brackenridge, 2007). Instead, we are typically reliant on the kinds of accounts outlined earlier in which former players recall their time as a youth

player to make sense of the welfare issues that have hitherto been ignored by academic writings in the area. As Pitchford (2007, p. 111) has noted:

Although many ex-professionals have commented in their autobiographies on their times as schoolboys and trainees associated with clubs, any suggestion that these experiences were negative or problematic in some way would be swept aside by nostalgic, uncritical apology for the “school of hard knocks”.

The lack of research which investigates players’ welfare may on the one hand be surprising, for the *Charter for Quality* created the expectation that, by virtue of running an Academy or CoE, a club is required to meet a number of criteria, including those that relate to educational provision for the young players and to safeguarding their rights and well-being (The FA, 1997). In line with these criteria, as noted earlier, to be awarded Academy status each club must employ a full-time Education and Welfare Officer’ (EWO) (The FA, 2007), whilst in a CoE it is expected that one member of staff will be charged with the responsibility of addressing child protection matters (The Football League Trust, 2010). The tendency for the welfare of players to be largely unexamined may also be understandable, for it is notoriously difficult to undertake research that examines practices that may be perceived as questionable by key stakeholders. An additional problem faced by researchers is what constitutes ‘welfare’ is not generally well understood and the term is, at best, ambiguously defined and is often used interchangeably to encompass a range of behaviours that may include verbal exchanges and altercations, intensive training regimes, playing with pain and injury, severe dieting, and emotional and sexual abuse (Brackenridge, 2001; David, 2005).

Accordingly, it is often difficult for researchers to differentiate the kinds of behaviours that may be regarded as contravening socially accepted standards outside of the professional game from others that may, in contrast, be perceived as being ‘part of the game’ and central to the sub-cultural expectations significant others have of players (Brackenridge, 2007; Pitchford, 2007). Based on the findings of the most significant empirical studies in this area (Brackenridge *et al.*, 2007), Pitchford (2007, p. 118) provides an appropriately cautious and balanced conclusion on clubs’ apparent commitment to safeguarding young players’ welfare in the context of the culture of the game as follows:

Just as there may well be clubs with progressive recruitment and welfare policies, there may well also be clubs that fulfil their minimum requirements but allow aspects of the historic culture to be perpetuated.

In this regard, it is clear that further research is required to examine further how the prevailing values about, and approach towards, the welfare of players is being enacted in practice by clubs, alongside their commitment to developing players along authoritarian and traditional lines that reinforce the clear power differentials that characterize the game (Brackenridge, 2007).



## **Summary**

The objective of this chapter has been to review the literature relevant for this study of young players' views and experiences of education and welfare provisions within professional football Academies and CoE. Of particular note, it has been argued, are the number of sub-cultural expectations to which players are required to adhere in the working-class game of professional football. In that respect, research reviewed in this chapter indicates how these characteristics are most clearly expressed in two ways. Firstly, in the managerial approaches adopted by managers and coaches as ways of controlling players on the basis of strict authority, intimidation, discipline and obedience, and secondly, in the existence of a shop-floor culture between players and club management that is central to the ways players think and act on a daily basis in relation to their education and welfare. These themes will be returned to in chapters four to six. The next chapter, however, outlines the key assumptions and concepts of the sociological approach adopted in the present study.

## **Note**

<sup>1</sup> Over time, young players have been known under various names such as 'trainees,' 'apprentices' and 'scholars'. Currently, young players who are in Academies in the Premier League, for example, are known as 'scholars', while those in Academies and CoE in the Football League tend to be called apprentices. In this thesis, 'players' will be used as a catch-all term for any young player currently undertaking a scholarship or apprenticeship at their respective club.

## Chapter Two

### **Figurational Sociology**

#### **Introduction**

As Plummer (2010, p. 3) has noted, during the course of research, one of the primary tasks for sociologists is to ‘ask how people come to assemble their social lives and social worlds in radically different ways in different times and places’. This requires sociologists to examine not only the people whose social lives and worlds they wish to understand, but also the complex relationships they comprise with the many other groups of people with whom they are interdependent. In short, Plummer (2010, p. 24; emphases in the original) argues that:

We are always linked to others, so the wider whole is always greater than the part. Typically, *we search for underlying patterns in these relations, examine the meanings that people give to their lives in cultures, and see all of this as flowing in a constant and perpetual stream of social actions.* There is no such thing as an isolated individual.

The objective of this chapter is to outline the various ‘sensitizing concepts’ that were employed in this study to help develop a more adequate understanding of how players within Academies and CoE at professional football clubs come to assemble their lives in the way they do, and, in particular, the views and experiences they have of education and welfare. For the most part, these concepts, which are drawn primarily from the work of the figurational approach of Norbert Elias, include: the concept of ‘figuration’; ‘unintended consequences’; ‘blind social processes’; ‘power’; ‘habitus’; and ‘I-’, ‘we-’, and ‘they-’ identities. The chapter

also draws upon other concepts such as ‘identity’ and the ‘self’, which are perhaps more closely associated with the work of symbolic interactionist sociologists such as Mead, Blumer and Goffman. Before outlining the central organizing concept of figurational sociology, namely, the ‘figuration’ (Murphy, Sheard & Waddington, 2000), it is worth outlining the following principles – derived from the work of Elias – that are taken as points of departure from other commonplace theoretical perspectives that inform much of the work in the sociology of youth and sport:

1. Sociology is about people in the plural – human beings who are interdependent with each other in a variety of ways, whose lives evolve in and are significantly shaped by the social figurations they form together.
2. These figurations are constantly in flux, undergoing changes of many kinds – some rapid and ephemeral, others slow but perhaps more lasting.
3. The long-term developments taking place in human figurations have been and continue to be largely unplanned and unforeseen.
4. The development of human knowledge takes place within human figurations, and is one important aspect of their overall development. (Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998, p. 39)

### **Human figurations and networks of interdependence**

Elias dedicated much of his work to critiquing ‘what he called the *Homo clausus*, or “closed personality” image of humans’ (van Krieken, 1998, p. 56), which he argued was driven by the tendency for many sociologists to conceptualize the ‘individual’ and ‘society’ as if they

were separate and opposing things (Elias, 1978; Murphy *et al.*, 2000). Rather than viewing humans as *Homo clausus*, that is, as freely acting, self-contained and separate human beings who exist independently of the society in which they live (Elias, 1978, 2001; Murphy *et al.*, 2000), Elias proposed ‘seeing humans in the plural ... as part of collectives, of groups and networks, and stressed that their very identity as unique individuals only existed within and through those networks’ (van Krieken, 1998, p. 55). In rejecting the dominant *Homo clausus* approach to understanding the relationship between the ‘individual’ and ‘society’ in much orthodox sociological writing, Elias introduced the concept of figuration to help capture and emphasize the processual character of human societies. He argued that sociologists should be concerned with viewing human beings as *Homines aperti*, as open pluralities of interdependent people ‘bonded together in dynamic constellations’ (Murphy *et al.*, 2000, p. 92). Accordingly, Elias (2000, p. 316) described a figuration as ‘a structure of mutually oriented and dependent people’ who constitute historically produced and reproduced networks of interdependence. Therefore, to adequately understand the relationships between individuals and groups of people it is essential to study them as comprising figurations of interdependent human beings (Elias, 1978). In other words, it is only possible to conceptualize the thoughts and actions of individual young footballers by exploring the pattern of their interdependence, the structure of their societies, and the figurations they form with each other. Indeed, it was Elias’s contention that ‘living together in mutual dependencies is a basic condition for all human beings’ (Goudsblom, 1977, p. 7), which is why:

Rather than seeing individuals as ever having any autonomous, pre-social existence, Elias emphasized human beings’ interdependence with each other, the fact that one can only become an individual human being within a web of social relationships and within

a network of interdependencies with one's family, school, church, community, ethnic group, class, gender, work organization and so on. (van Krieken, 1998, p. 55)

Conceptualizing humans (such as young football players) as mutually-oriented and dependent people who comprise figurations and complex networks of interdependence sensitizes us to the ways in which human beings are enabled, and constrained, in their thoughts and actions by the people with whom they are interdependent. We are not enabled and constrained, it is argued, by what Elias considered 'reified social forces' (Murphy *et al.*, 2000, p. 92) such as the schools we attend, the countries we live in, where we are employed, the families into which we are born, or, in the case of the present study, the Academies and CoE players attend. Rather, we are enabled and constrained by the people who comprise our school, our country, our place of employment, our family, and the people with whom we interact on a day-to-day basis. As we interact with these people who comprise figurations and whose networks of interdependence of which we are a part, then, 'we are always connecting, even balancing, our inner resources given to us in our bodies and emotions (partly genetic) with those we find all around us in other people – near and far – whose significance helps give meanings to our lives' (Plummer, 2010, p. 22).

Finally, in this study of young footballers and their relationships with adult members of professional clubs, it is worth briefly reflecting upon the long-term changes in the character of adult-child relations, as well as processes of youth development more generally, which has 'concerned a double-edged development' (van Krieken, 1998, p. 156) associated with the unplanned civilizing of social relations. As Wouters (2011, p. 142) has noted, there has since the nineteenth century been a gradual trend away from 'social constraints towards self-constraints' in which all groups, but especially adults and children, have in largely unplanned

ways placed increasing restraint both over themselves and over each other (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2006; van Krieken, 1998; Wouters, 2011). This process has involved two principal developments. On the one hand, there has been a long-term '*democratization* of relations between adults and children and a decline in inequality between them' and, on the other, 'a decline in the ritualized expressions of respect for parental authority and a more general *informalization* of relations between adults and children' (van Krieken, 1998, p. 156; emphases in the original). As networks of interdependency have expanded and societies have become less hierarchical, the power differentials and social distance between groups have narrowed and resulted in a gradual social equalization between, for example, adults and young people (e.g. young footballers) (Elias, 1978; Wouters, 2007, 2011). Whilst there remain rather unequal power relations in modern societies such as Britain, Elias (1978, p. 69) described this unplanned process as involving:

the narrowing of power differentials and development towards a less uneven distribution of power chances; it permeates the whole gamut of social bonds, although there are impulses simultaneously running counter to this trend.

In the context of a gradual social equalization in the power relations between adults and young people, several waves of informalization have occurred simultaneously, the most recent of which occurred during the 1960s and 1970s (Kilminster, 1998; Wouters, 2007, 2011). As Wouters (2011, p. 141) has noted, among the overall trends in informalization have been:

a declining social and psychic distance between social classes, sexes and generations; a mixing of codes and ideals; increasing interdependencies; an informalization of manners; expanding mutual identifications; and ‘emancipation of emotions’.

One consequence of the gradual informalization of social relations that is of particular relevance to this study has been the tendency for the modes of behaviour between adults and younger people to grow closer together as the balance of power between them has tilted away from adults, and towards being more in favour of younger people (Wouters, 1977, 2007). The changing power differentials between adults and young people have resulted, among other things, in more relaxed modes of behaviour, greater levels of leniency, differentiation and variety that currently find expression in the ‘emancipation of emotions’ (Wouters, 2011, p. 142) that have characterized this process. In relation to young people such as the players in this study, the increased social mixing with adults has been accompanied by ‘the less formal regulation of the spoken and written language, clothing, music, dancing and hair styles’ (Kilminster, 1998, p. 151) as they negotiate and ‘experiment with the boundaries of what is acceptable’ (Kilminster, 1998, p. 152) in social life. This expansion in the ‘range of behavioural and emotional alternatives’ (Wouters, 2011, p. 157) as part of processes of informalization have also been interwoven in many complex ways with other broader social processes, most notably the individualization of life that has characterized the growth of ‘youth’s new condition’ (Roberts, 1996), and the gradual change in the power ratios between adults and younger people.

## Power

For figural sociologists, like many other sociologists, power is a ‘prominent – if contested – feature of the social’ (Plummer, 2010, p. 117) world because complex networks of differentially interdependent people are characterized by power differentials that are dynamic and continually in flux (Elias, 1978; Murphy *et al.*, 2000). More specifically, Elias (1978, p. 74) argued that ‘balances of power are always present wherever there is functional interdependence between people’. As human figurations are the aggregate of multiple one-on-one relationships between groups of people, they ‘are always organized around the dynamic operation of *power*’ (van Krieken, 1998, p. 57; original emphasis). The power differentials that characterize the networks of interdependence of which people are a part, however, are always a question of relative balances, never of absolute possession or absolute deprivation, for no one is ever absolutely powerful or absolutely powerless (Murphy *et al.*, 2000). For example, whilst young footballers may perceive themselves as occupying an entirely powerless position compared to those occupied by the coach or manager of an Academy or CoE, that club management at least have to take into account their needs indicates the degree of power that individual and groups of players have to constrain the actions of their superiors.

It is also important to note that while power differentials can be expressed in a number of different forms (e.g. coercive, economic, political, or physical), there are numerous limitations of any theory that:

explains power differentials only in terms of a monopolistic possession of non-human objects, such as weapons or means of production, and disregards figural aspects of



power differentials due purely to the differences in the degree of organisation of the human beings concerned. (Elias, 1994, p. xviii)

From a figural perspective, therefore, power can only be adequately conceptualized as a structural characteristic of human figurations, and not solely as an object of possession (Elias, 1978). The balances of power that characterize human figurations vary as the balance of dependency between the people who constitute them change. Consider, for example, the relationship between a child and their parents. In the first months of their life, ‘children are ... as good as completely in the power of their parents; more precisely, the parents’ power chances – compared with those of their children – are very great’ (Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998, p. 195). Whilst it would be easy to assume that the balance of power was tilted totally in favour of the parents, this is clearly not the case, for the young child is usually valued by its parents and this constrains them to act in relation to their needs; indeed, ‘in many cases, the birth of a child forces the parents to re-arrange their lifestyles’ (Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998, p. 195). As Goudsblom (1977, p. 7) has noted:

From the moment it is born a child is dependent upon others who will feed, protect, fondle, and instruct it. The child may not always like the constraints exerted by its strong dependencies, but it has no choice. By its own wants it is tied to other human beings – to its parents in the first place, and through its parents to many others, most of whom may remain unknown to the child for a long time, perhaps forever. All of the child’s learning, its learning to speak, to think, to act, takes place in a setting of social interdependencies. As a result, to the very core of their personalities men [sic] are

bonded to each other. They can be understood only in terms of the various figurations to which they have belonged in the past and which they continue to form in the present.

For figural sociologists, therefore, the balances of power between, and behaviour of, children and their parents change characteristically over time and from one society to another throughout the life course as the networks of interdependencies of which they are a part from birth become longer, more complex, and more differentiated (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). As the child develops and grows, for example, their actions and behaviours will change as they learn from people around them, especially their parents. These changes in behaviour find expression in the changing nature of the relationships between the child and their parents, and the power differentials that characterize those relationships. Mennell and Goudsblom (1998, p. 36) explain the changes in the degree to which young people are dependent on their parents, for example, and the associated changes that typically characterize this process, as follows:

Because people are usually not equally dependent on each other, the power ratios between them are usually unequal ... the power ratio between children and the adults on whom they are at first overwhelmingly dependent changes in a characteristic way over their lifetimes, and by the time the parents have reached old age the power ratio has usually tilted over in the opposite direction, in favor of their offspring.

Conceptualizing social relations in this way helps us to understand how, as people such as young footballers grow older, they become increasingly dependent upon, and interdependent with, many other people, which is often associated with a reduction in the power imbalances

between younger people and adults (Goodwin & O'Connor, 2006, 2009; Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998). From the perspective of young people this is often because as they progress through each life-stage they are less likely to need the same care from their parents as they once did and, in the parents' later years, it is their children who are often constrained to care for them as they reach older age. Mennell and Goudsblom (1998, p. 18) describe the process thus:

As webs of interdependence spread, more people become more involved in more complex and more impenetrable relations. Less abstractly: more people are forced more often to pay more attention to more people, in more varying circumstances. This produces pressures towards greater consideration of the consequences of one's own action for other people on whom one is in one way or another dependent.

Thus, the relationships between young people and others can be most adequately conceptualized as 'emerging and contingent processes' (Murphy *et al.*, 2000, p. 93) where, in conjunction with the lengthening and increasing complexity of interdependency networks, the balance of power between groups who constitute those figurations also varies. Given the multi-dimensional character of these power relationships, it is important to recognize the ways in which people are 'interconnected by a multiplicity of dynamic bonds' (Murphy *et al.*, 2000, p. 93) within their interdependent networks. This is because in order to understand the ways in which people think and act, 'we have always to consider the many social needs by which these people are bonded to each other and to other people' (Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998, p. 22). These bonds connect figurations of people, such as young footballers, together within networks of social interdependencies and these must be investigated sociologically to examine the ways in which people continually cope with the problems of their

interdependence with, and mutual dependence upon, others who comprise their relational networks (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom, 1977).

It is equally important to recognize that whilst changes in young people's figurations are often brought about by the intentional actions of the groups involved, they are typically unplanned and unintended (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom, 1977). More specifically, figurational sociologists emphasize that the outcomes of complex processes involving the interweaving of the actions of large numbers of people cannot be explained simply in terms of the intentions of individuals. These outcomes, it is argued, are not outcomes that happen by chance or occur in an *ad-hoc* manner. Rather, they are the normal result of complex processes involving the interweaving of the more-or-less goal directed actions of large numbers of people that generates outcomes which no-one has planned (Elias, 1978). The significance of these unintended outcomes and 'blind' social processes for the present study is considered in the next section.

### **Unintended consequences and 'blind' social processes**

For figurational sociologists the concept of the figuration helps to explain more adequately social life (van Krieken, 1998) and, in particular, the relationship between individuals and the societies they form. The concept of the figuration and networks of interdependencies also draws attention to the ways in which the differential power relations between those who constitute figurations can influence their own, and others', actions, the outcomes of which are typically unplanned and contribute to the largely *ad-hoc* and 'blind' development of social

life (Elias, 1978). This aspect of social life is often overlooked, not least because for many human beings:

It is frightening to realize that people from functional interconnections within which much of what they do is blind, purposeless and involuntary. It is much more reassuring to believe that history – which is of course always the history of particular human societies – has a meaning, a destination, perhaps even a purpose. (Elias, 1978, p. 58)

Thus, notwithstanding the attractive simplicity of conceptualizing social life solely in terms of the purposeful and intended actions of human interactions, such a view fails to begin to address the question: ‘How does it happen at all that formations arise in the human world that no single human being has intended, and which yet are anything but cloud formations without stability or structure?’ (Elias, 2000, p. 365-6). Put simply, how can we begin to explain how social developments such as famine, global warming, or world wars, come to develop, even though, for the most part, many people may not have deliberately intended these to occur? For Elias, the explanation, once again, begins with an understanding of the figurations involved and, more precisely, the ways in which ‘unplanned consequences of planned human actions arise from their repercussions within a web woven by the actions of many people (Elias, 1978, p. 146). Indeed, as Murphy and Sheard (2006) have noted, throughout all aspects of his work, Elias continually stressed the importance of the unplanned dimensions of human activity and, in that respect, Elias claimed that social life is most adequately understood as resulting from the *‘unplanned and unintended outcomes of the interweaving of intentional human actions’* (van Krieken, 1998: 49; emphases in the original). In particular, Elias argued that ‘plans and actions, the emotional and rational impulses of individual people,

constantly interweave in a friendly and hostile way' (Elias, 2000, p. 366), which gives rise to consequences that no one originally intended. In this regard, the intended actions of people often arise out of their concern with protecting, maintaining or advancing their own interests (Murphy & Sheard, 2006), which may coincide, partially coincide, or contradict the actions of others who also actively seek to protect, maintain or advance their own position.

That the usual consequences of human interaction produce outcomes that no one person, or group of people, originally intended draws attention to the unintended dimensions of human activity. As Elias (2000, p. 366; emphases in the original) put it:

*The basic tissue resulting from many single plans and actions of people can give rise to changes and patterns that no individual person has planned or created. From this interdependence of people arises an order sui generis, an order more compelling and stronger than the will and reason of the individual people composing it.*

These unintentional and unplanned consequences, which Elias (1978) called 'blind' social processes, are not 'the work of the mysterious reified forces to which so many sociologists have recourse' (Murphy & Sheard, 2006, p. 555). Rather, they are the normal result of social processes involving the complex interweaving of the more-or-less goal-directed actions of large groups of human beings who seek to defend, maintain and advance their own perceived interests within the figurations of which they are a part (Elias, 1978, 1987; Murphy & Sheard, 2006). Thus, when seeking to adequately understand human relationships, including those characteristic of Academies or CoE at professional football clubs, 'people can only hope to master and make sense out of these purposeless, meaningless functional interconnections if they can recognize them as relatively autonomous, distinctive functional interconnections,

and investigate them systematically' (Elias, 1978, p. 58-9). In this respect, it will be argued in chapters four to six of this thesis that an adequate understanding of the concept of figurations, unintended consequences, and 'blind' social processes are vital pre-requisites for making sense of the lives of the players who participated in this study. These ideas, which bring together the distinctly Eliasian concepts of dynamic networks of interdependency, human figurations, unintended consequences, 'blind' social processes and power, are elaborated upon in Elias's game models analogy of social processes that are discussed next (Elias, 1978).

### **Game models**

In his endeavour to study the 'composite unit' of human societies rather than the 'composite parts', Elias (1978, p. 92) proposed 'the image of people playing a game as a metaphor for people forming societies together'. By conceptualizing society in this manner, Elias (1978, p. 73) claimed that 'the ways in which human aims and actions intertwine is demonstrated by means of a series of models. In this way, the inherently complex processes of interweaving are temporarily isolated in close focus, and thereby made more easily understandable'. As Dopson and Waddington (1996, p. 525) have noted, these game models 'enable us better to understand the complex interweaving of planned and unplanned processes' by not focusing solely on the intentions and actions of individuals and groups, but on the dynamic networks of interdependency involved. For the most part, the games that Elias proposed should be seen as resembling 'real games like chess, bridge, football or tennis' (Elias, 1978, p. 73) since they each have rules and contain a certain number of players, all of whom have their own objectives when playing the game. In addition, Elias argued that this is 'the basic situation encountered wherever people enter into or find themselves in relations with one another'

(Elias, 1978, p. 73) and the game models analogy is, therefore, a particularly useful way of explaining complex social processes.

Before briefly outlining the premises of Elias's game models, it is worth noting that Elias initially proposed what he called the 'Primal Contest' as a way of demonstrating that rules are not necessarily required for there to be mutual interdependence between people or groups of people (Elias, 1978). In this scenario, Elias draws on the actions of two tribal groups as they battle for food in a forest. Elias described a situation where food within the forest is becoming scarce and is resulting in tension increasing between the groups as they constantly get in each others way when hunting and gathering food. In order to decrease the competition for the ever decreasing level of food, one group murders a number of their opposition. In an act of revenge, the second group then takes the lives of the women and children of the first group, indicating the extent to which 'each move of one group determines each move of the other group and *vice versa*' (Elias, 1978, p. 77; emphases in the original) despite the apparent dearth of rules. In short, from this example, it is clear that it is 'not possible to explain the action, plans and aims of either of the two groups if they are conceptualized as the freely chosen decisions, plans and aims of each group considered on its own, independently of the other group' (Elias, 1978, p. 77).

In addition to the Primal Contest, the simplest game model proposed by Elias is that involving two people whereby one player is much stronger and more powerful than the other player. In this context, the stronger player can constrain the intentions and actions of the weaker player to a considerable degree, whereas the latter is much less able to constrain those of the stronger player (Elias, 1978). Consequently, when the balance of power is perceived to



favour the stronger, more powerful player, this will, by degrees, 'directly affect the way both parties act and feel towards each other' (Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998, p. 22) insofar as the weaker player, in particular, is more likely to experience feelings of powerlessness than the other. This having been said, as with all 'bi-polar' relationships, it is important to note that:

the weaker player does have some degree of control over the stronger player for, in planning his or her own moves the stronger player has at least to take the weaker player's moves into account. (Dopson & Waddington, 1996, p. 537)

If the strength of the two players and the power ratios between them are more equal, it becomes increasingly difficult to predict the moves of the players and the overall outcome of the game follows a largely 'blind' course (Dopson & Waddington, 1996; Elias, 1978). More specifically, as Elias (1978, p. 82) has noted, 'the extent that the inequality in the strengths of the two players diminishes, there will result from the interweaving of moves of the two individual people a game process which neither of them has planned'.

The two-person game outlined by Elias helps explain a bi-polar relationship in which the interdependence between two people constrains them both, to a greater or lesser extent, to act in particular ways and in a manner that was not intended by either party. The game models of social relationships were also proposed by Elias as a way of highlighting the power ratios between people or groups of people comprising multi-polar relationships, which are much more akin to the relationships that characterize human figurations and networks of interdependencies found within professional football Academies and CoE. In order to do this, Elias depicts 'a game in which player A is playing simultaneously against several other

players, B, C, D and so on' (Elias, 1978, p. 82). These multi-person games can be conceptualized as 'a series of games for two people, each game having its own balance of power and developing in its own way' (Elias, 1978, p. 83) and illustrate how the relative strength of the players diminishes when more people are added to a figuration of people who are playing independently, which simultaneously increases the likelihood of unintended outcomes characterizing the game. Even in the situation of Player A being presented as the most powerful person in the numerous individual two-person games and the game overall, even though the 'distribution of power is unequivocally unequal, inelastic and stable' (Elias, 1978, p. 83), Player A is still constrained, to some degree, by the actions of the weaker players in the game. Moreover, by virtue of the fact that Player A is constrained to take into consideration more than one person's actions within a multi-player game, they are more constrained when seeking to control the overall game than they would if they were playing just one player of a similar strength. Indeed, 'the position might alter to A's disadvantage, if the number of independent games he is playing should increase' (Elias, 1978, p. 83) partly because 'there is a limit to the span of active relationships independent one from another which one person can pursue simultaneously' (Elias, 1978, p. 83). In this situation, Player A finds it harder and harder to understand the figuration of the game and, consequently, to make the correct move they must make in order to increase the probability of them winning the overall game. Thus, for Elias (1978, p. 85), the individual player 'not only finds the game increasingly opaque and uncontrollable, but he [sic] also gradually becomes aware of his [sic] inability to understand and control it'.

In his final game model – the multi-tier game – Elias introduced a scenario where a second tier of players establish themselves in the game and exist above the first level of players. Although each player in the game, on both levels, continues to play independently, 'they no

longer all play directly with each other' (Elias, 1978, p. 86) because the second tier of players take responsibility for co-ordinating the game. The second tier of players – who could be conceived as being 'representatives, delegates, leaders, governments, royal courts, monopolistic elites and so forth' (Elias, 1978, p. 86) – only exist because of the first level of players, for without the first tier of players there would be no second tier. This relationship between the second tier of players and those in the first tier are, like all social relationships, characterized by a series of complex power struggles. The power balances between the players in the first and second tiers of the game, as in any of Elias's game models, are not stable and they fluctuate. Indeed, when the second tier is comprised of a relatively small number of players their ability to control the game is greater than if more players are in the tier. The power balances between players in both tiers are also influenced by their relationships with players in other tiers of the game as people in the second tier form alliances with some people and not with others. In short, 'they interlock like cogwheels, and so people who are enemies on one level may be allies on another' (Elias, 1978, p. 87), which illustrates how, within networks of interdependencies, additional figurational alliances can develop and help lengthen and increase the complexity of social relationships. In a two-tier game:

There is the power balance within the small group at the upper level, secondly the power balance between players at the first level and players at the second, thirdly the power balance between the groups at the lower level and, if one wishes to go even further, one might add the power balance *within* each of these lower-level groups. (Elias, 1978, p. 87; original emphasis)

At the heart of Elias's game models approach, therefore, is a recognition that the structure of the composite unit and the relational constraints that characterize dynamic interdependency

networks can change considerably as the distribution of power between human beings changes (Elias, 1978; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998).

The final two-tiered game model is particularly relevant to this study because it closely represents the structure of a football Academy or CoE at a professional football club, and may, therefore, help explain the views and experiences of those therein. In any Academy or CoE players constitute the first level of the game and the coaches and management of the Academy or CoE make up the second tier. The people (such as managers and coaches) in the second tier of the Academy or CoE, as in the game outlined by Elias, possess a significant degree of control over access to the game as they are the ones who are responsible for selecting who is given a scholarship at any club. The game can also be conceptualized as comprising more than two tiers as the management of the club, and the board, occupy positions above the level of the Academy and CoE and seek to play their own game and pursue their own interests as well as being constrained by those in the bottom tier.

### **Habitus and identity**

As noted earlier, the power ratios between social groups such as parents and their young children are often heavily tilted in favour of the parents until the child begins to develop and grow older (Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). At this point, the balance of power shifts towards the young person as they undertake a process of social learning that allows them to cope better with the constraints of their interdependence with others without as much guidance from their parents. In conjunction with this process of social learning, much of which occurs from parents in the early years, is the development of habitus among individuals and groups.

For Elias, habitus refers to a person's 'second nature' or 'embodied social learning' which acts as an 'automatic, blindly functioning apparatus of self-control' (Elias, 2000, p. 368) that develops within their networks of interdependencies. Elias added that whilst each person develops their own individual and unique habitus, they also develop a series of group habituses – such as gender and social class habituses – that are shared with other groups who have been habituated through similar experiences (Dunning, 2002). These habituses are psychologically and socially generated through a '*process* which [begins] at birth and continue[s] throughout a person's childhood and youth' (van Krieken, 1998, p. 59; original emphasis), which Elias (2000) described as the 'most impressionable phase' of habitus development.

For Elias (2000), whilst habitus develops most rapidly during childhood and youth, it continues to develop more slowly throughout a person's life and never ceases entirely to be affected by the ways in which the changing social relations in which people find themselves become more-or-less complex and are perceived as more-or-less compelling (van Krieken, 1998). In drawing attention to the historical character of habitus and the processual nature of young people's social development from childhood through to adulthood and older age (van Krieken, 1998), Elias sought to:

'stretch' our understanding of habitus and the person over the whole period of any individual's biography, from the absolute dependence of a newborn infant, through the gradual acquisition of relative independence as an adult, and then the greater dependence of old age. (van Krieken, 1998, p. 154)

It is clear, therefore, that the social learning that all human beings are constrained to undertake in the course of their interdependence with others plays a significant role in the development of habitus, and the views we develop, and experiences we have, of the world. Whilst there is a genetic component to our individual personality structure or habitus, much of it is shaped by our social learning. As Plummer (2010, p. 21; emphases in original) has noted:

Both environment *and* genes play significant roles in the shaping of human lives. It is true that different researchers' disciplines will inevitably emphasise different aspects; but most will now agree that the interaction between the two is a crucial matter. *There are always evolutionary pushes and specific biological and genetic influences at the same time as there are always also specific historical and cultural shapers.*

This point is perhaps most clearly expressed in the relationship between a child and their parents referred to earlier. Following their birth, 'if they [babies] are left on their own, without the formative impacts of other people, then they will simply not develop' (Plummer, 2010, p. 20) and, therefore, require their parents to play some role in teaching them what they need to know in order to survive. In the very early stages of the child's life, of course, these lessons may include how to feed, how to walk, and how to communicate; things that, given time, they may learn for themselves to some degree in the context of their networks of interdependencies. As the child grows, however, their parents often take a more active role in teaching them behaviours that are thought to adhere to accepted social standards, rather than just the basic functions of existence, such as where to excrete, to cover their mouth when they yawn or cough, how to eat at a table, how to address people in a polite way, and so forth.

Thus, although the social process of learning partly focuses on the development of survival skills, the majority of the social development of children through the process of interaction with parents is around what is deemed socially acceptable in certain situations. These lessons are not always consciously learnt, for they may be passed on through children copying the actions or opinions of parents without their parents knowing. All-in-all, what develops during the process of social learning in childhood are:

the metaphorical dwellings in which we live, but they are not outside but within us, within our minds. They are formed during socialisation and comprise durable perceptions, understandings and predispositions to action. (Roberts, 2009, p. 20)

As children grow older, they come into contact with more and more people and begin schooling of different kinds, enter into friendship groups, begin work, and leave the parental home to live on their own, or with others such as a partner, all the time being socialized into different ways of thinking, acting and communicating with others. Plummer (2010, p. 21) describes this process as follows:

We have to learn it from our earliest childhood experiences. It starts when the baby begins to realise there is something beyond its own world of instinctual gratification, as it comes to recognise and identify with the faces and hands around it (on which it depends). Bit by bit it moves from a pulsating little bundle of egocentric desires towards the recognition of others and ultimately a much wider social world.

The processes involved in the socialization of human beings within particular social networks, and the ways in which this helps construct their lives and personal identities, is also central to the work of symbolic interactionists (Blumer, 1969). As Blumer (1969) has noted, the focus of symbolic interactionism is typically on the symbolic significance of signs, symbols, shared rules (e.g. accepting without question the decisions of club managers) and written and spoken language (e.g. the use of ‘banter’ in everyday life as a footballer), and the ways in which the use of symbols assists us to make sense of our own and others’ behaviour. In this regard, interactionists place particular emphasis on the significance of relatively small, face-to-face, interaction between individuals and groups as a means of understanding social relations between groups such as young footballers and significant others, including their coaches and managers. Given the capacity of human beings for symbolic communication and interaction they are, therefore, able – individually and collectively – to ‘define’, interpret, and give meaning to each others’ actions (Blumer, 1969) depending on their values, experiences, and habitus.

As the symbolic interactionist George Herbert Mead has argued, humans each acquire and continually develop a ‘self’ as they constantly monitor the ways in which others see them and how humans often ‘consume not products but symbols with the intention of establishing social differentiation’ (Lash & Urry, as cited in Laberge & Kay, 2004, p. 246). More specifically, as Blumer (1998, p. 62) has noted, in asserting that ‘the human being has a self, Mead meant that the human being is an object to himself. The human being may perceive himself, have conceptions of himself, communicate with himself, and act towards himself’. In this regard, the ‘self’ helps us to illustrate how humans can be the object of their own actions (Blumer, 1969) are in continuous dialogue with their ‘self’ by designating ‘things to himself – his wants, his pains, his goals, objects around him, the presence of others, their actions,



their expected actions, or whatnot' (Blumer, 1998, p. 62) as a way of monitoring, evaluating and redressing the way we are seen by others in an attempt to appear as socially acceptable as possible to others. Throughout our lives, then, we:

live in the thoughts of imagined others even when we are unaware of this, and our social lives are constantly being shaped by this. The self is reflective and reflexive and tries to make sense of social life in a perpetual conversation with itself. (Plummer, 2010, p. 22)

But to what extent is the 'self' of use to us in the social world? It is clear that being reflective about how we perceive ourselves has consequences for the ways in which we live our lives, but through an establishment of the 'self' we are also able to adjust to the world around us and interact better with other people. In this regard, the self 'serves to create a necessary bridge between the truly unique person and the more general social being. Having some sense of self and self awareness helps us to evolve more as a coherent, even flourishing, social people' (Plummer, 2010, p. 21). In short, the 'self' can be thought of as an internal instrument that helps us navigate through life by assisting in establishing what is and is not socially acceptable by providing people with a mechanism of self-interaction that is used in forming and guiding their conduct (Blumer, 1969, 1998).

For symbolic interactionists, then, humans' ability to act towards themselves is the central process through which they face and deal with the world (Blumer, 1969), and the interpersonal processes involved in developing and sustaining particular identities, or self-

images (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1961), are of particular importance to any study of social interactions such as those which occur in Academies and CoE. For example, the process of developing and sustaining a self-image by young players involves a process of symbolic communication and negotiation with others, and with themselves, during their everyday 'focused encounters' (Goffman, 1961) with significant others. Thus, interactionists are particularly interested in the ways in which people (such as young players) continually attempt to convey to others particular images of how they would like others to see them, and of how they would like to see themselves during the course of social interaction. As Goffman (1959) has noted, these interactions and the processes involved in accepting, rejecting, or modifying preferred self-images typically vary depending on whether one is 'front stage' (as if in public) or 'back stage' (as if in private). Thus, to adequately understand the ways in which young players' self-images are continually produced and modified during the process of social interaction requires an appreciation of how they help form the self-image of others (e.g. teammates), just as others (e.g. coaches and managers) contribute to their own self-image (Roderick, 2006). Doing so holds out the possibility of exploring how players may interpret this process positively by, for example, reinforcing perceptions of them as possessing a 'good attitude' towards their work, or negatively as someone who is often injured, which may 'discredit' or stigmatize them (Goffman, 1963) and thus undermine their preferred self-images.

The process of identity construction during the course of social interaction as conceptualized by interactionists may also be understood in conjunction with what figurational sociologists call the 'I-', 'we-', and 'they-' identities of human beings that are developed through our face-to-face, and non face-to-face, relationships with others (Dunning, 1999; Elias, 2001). For Elias (2001), it is characteristic of the structure of more developed societies such as

Britain that ‘the differences between people, their I-identity, are valued more highly than what they have in common, their we-identity’ (Elias, 2001, p. 156). This, he argued, is closely related to the long-term trend towards the individualization of social life, the roots of which can be traced back to the Renaissance period (Elias, 2001). The growth of individualization, Elias (2001) argued, should be viewed as a social transformation of self-consciousness that is ‘both *historical*, in that whole societies have undergone or are still undergoing them today, and *personal*, in that every child undergoes them in growing up’ (Elias, 2001, p. 117; emphases in the original).

The two-edged character of individualization as a ‘new form of self-consciousness’ (Elias, 2001, p. 97) that has developed over the course of several centuries is said to have involved a gradual shift in the balance between the ‘we-’ and ‘I-’ identity, which are integral to the social habitus of a person, towards the ‘I-’ identity (Dunning, 1999; Elias, 2001). In other words, as Elias argued (2001, p. 179), emphasis has come increasingly to be placed on ‘the I-identity of the individual person, and the detachment of that person from the traditional groupings’ of other people of whom we may or may not be aware. In relation to young people (such as the footballers who participated in this study) it has been argued that during their growing autonomy and individualization the young person gradually learns to ‘think of himself/herself as an “I”, to acquire an identity and sense of self’ (Dunning, 1999, p. 4) through processes of interaction with the developing self and others. This process of developing a socially acceptable ‘we-I balance’ (Elias, 2001) is the ‘formation of bonds with others that are neither too distant nor too close and in which a balance is struck between autonomy and dependence’ (Dunning, 1999, p. 4). Thus, a central part of the process of ‘growing-up’ for young people is the expectation that they will seek to express their own individualized preferences and identities without appearing as neither too ‘self-absorbed’ or

‘too dependent on the groups to which he/she belongs’ (Dunning, 1999, p. 4) and with whom they comprise ‘we’ and ‘they’ relationships.

This having being said, Elias emphasized that a person’s I-identity is not so deeply ingrained that it does not change over time and as they grow older. Indeed, Elias argued that we can sympathize with a person who ‘cannot understand that the child he [sic] once was and the grown-up he [sic] now is are one and the same person’ (Elias, 2001, p. 185) because the ‘I-’ identity of a person is different at the age of 60 than it would be at the age of 16. It is equally important to note that, for figurational sociologists, there is no ‘I-’ identity without ‘we-’ identities, such as those formed by nations, governments, Academies or CoE. Indeed, Elias (2001, p. 61) argued that:

The individual person is only able to say “I” if and because he [sic] can at the same time say “we”. Even the thought “I am”, and still more the thought “I think” presupposes the existence of other people and a communal life with them – in short, a group, a society.

The different identities humans develop over time are not mutually exclusive. The way we act in a certain group, the opinions we form, and the behaviours we establish from being part of that group (our we-identity) impacts on our I-identity in different situations to the extent that ‘the interpersonal functions and relations that we express by grammatical particles such as “I”, “you”, “he”, “she”, “we” and “they” are interdependent. None of them has any existence without the others’ (Elias, 2001, p. 62). Similarly, the ways in which we are able to remember situations and identities of the past, to a greater extent than most other organisms,

is a further expression of the ways in which our ‘I-’ and ‘we-’ identities are not solely present day formations, but products of our individual and social development:

The role of memory in the case of human being, the continuity of the process sequence as an element of I-identity is interwoven, to a greater degree than in any other living creature, with another element of I-identity: the continuity of memory. This faculty can preserve learned knowledge and therefore personal experiences in earlier phases as a means of active control of feeling and behaviour. (Elias, 2001, p. 187)

### **Blame gossip and human figurations**

As part of Elias’s more general work on the development of our social identities, Elias and Scotson (1994) also explained how the conceptions we have of ourselves and others are related to aspects of our social relationships. For example, he claimed that our we-identities are manifest in the establishment of group norms and standards that help generate praise or blame gossip that may or may not materialize from the social relationships we form with each other. It is often the case, Elias argued, that:

more established groups tend to demonstrate greater levels of social cohesion, and to identify themselves through a shared, common sense of history. Their “we group” image is invariably positive and built around strong and cohesive group charisma. (Bloyce, Liston, Platts & Smith, 2010, p. 451)

One of the ways in which groups such as young footballers, for example, attempt to advance, maintain and protect their own positions within Academies and CoE is through the use of ‘praise gossip’ and ‘blame gossip’. Elias conceptualized the use of these two forms of gossip in the following way:

One can distinguish ... between “praise gossip” – news items of communal interest which support a stereotyped belief in the special goodness of one’s own group, and “blame gossip” – news items which confirm the unfavourable standard beliefs about outsiders or deviants, and can be used as a device for controlling and checking them. (Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998, p. 107)

It was in the study of the established and the outsiders that Elias developed his ideas of the use of ‘blame’ and ‘praise’ gossip with Scotson. Indeed, Elias and Scotson’s (1994, p. 93) study of the established and the outsiders reinforced to Elias that:

One had the impression that news items about some breach of the accepted norms committed by communally known persons were savoured much more, they provided more entertainment and more pleasurable satisfaction for tellers and recipients alike, than gossip about someone who deserved praise for upholding the accepted standards or support in his or her head.

Although Elias and Scotson (1994) developed their ideas about the use of ‘praise’ and ‘blame’ gossip in everyday life as part of their community project, they argued that the

purpose of this form of social interaction could be generalized to other areas of social life. Indeed, Elias remarked that similar types of:

gossip can be found on other levels apart from those of neighbourhoods and communities, for instance as stereotypes of collective self-praise and collective abuse of castes or classes on a national, or of nations on an international level. (Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998, p. 107)

For reasons explained in Chapter Six, the use of ‘gossip’ by those within a professional football Academy and CoE (such as coaches, managers and scholars) can help to explain how, and why, they form their opinions and discuss their experiences in the way they do. In Elias and Scotson’s study, however, forms of ‘blame’ gossip were also seen to be popular among the local residents of Winston Parva because it ‘appealed more directly to the gossipers’ sense of their own righteousness’ (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 93) and served as confirmation with others that the actions and opinions of those utilizing the gossip were correct. In addition, gossip was used as a method by which to distance oneself from the actions of other people, especially when those actions contradicted the norms and values of one’s own group: ‘that one gossiped about it with others was proof of one’s own blamelessness’ (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 93).

The role of gossip generally is a further indication of the ways in which the identity of a person can shape his or her views and experiences of society and their life therein, for the gossip deployed by a person is heavily influenced by the recipients of the gossip and the

people who first passed the gossip on to them (Elias & Scotson, 1994). Those who pass the gossip are influenced by the ways in which they want to be viewed and what they perceive others want to hear. Similarly, when spreading gossip people seek to put their own opinion across for particular reasons, whether that be to contradict with another's beliefs or to conform with it (Elias & Scotson, 1994). It should be noted, however, that the social significance and purpose of gossip should not be viewed in isolation from the social relations within which it is used, and especially the habitus and identity formation of people. For Elias, this is because:

No individual grows up without this anchorage of his [sic] personal identity in the identification with a group or groups even though it may remain tenuous and may be forgotten in later life, and without some knowledge of the terms of praise and abuse, of the praise gossip and blame gossip, of the group superiority and group inferiority which go with it. (Elias & Scotson, 1994, p. 105)

### **Involvement and detachment**

The final concept of figurational sociology to be explored here is that of involvement and detachment, which Elias developed as a means of providing a more adequate approach to understanding the relationships between human values and the generation of knowledge (Elias, 1987; Murphy *et al.*, 2000). As an alternative to the conventional tendency to viewing the relationship between human values and understanding in terms of 'objectivity' or 'subjectivity', Elias developed the concepts of 'involvement' and 'detachment' in order to better illustrate how the acquisition of knowledge by humans can never be conducted with a total abandonment of one's values and beliefs. Rather, Elias 'conceptualizes the problem in



terms of *degrees* of involvement and detachment' (Murphy *et al.*, 2000, p. 94: original emphasis) to highlight that the two categories were not mutually exclusive, but also to emphasize the importance of the processual nature of accumulating knowledge. This framework, he argued, helps 'examine the development, over time, of more object-adequate from less object-adequate knowledge' (Murphy *et al.*, 2000, p. 94). One of the main features of Elias's approach to the sociology of knowledge was thus:

a rejection of *both* the concept of 'truth' as absolute distinct from 'falsity' *and* a relativistic conception of knowledge, in favour of the concept of a greater or lesser 'object adequacy' in human knowledge, lying somewhere between 'involvement' and 'detachment'. (van Krieken, 1998, p. 137: emphases in original)

In this regard, Elias did not conceptualize the relationship between involvement and detachment in dichotomous terms, or as simple equivalents of objectivity and subjectivity as some critics have claimed (e.g. Blackshaw, 2002; Hargreaves, 1992; Horne and Jary, 1987). Instead, he consistently argued that the relationship is best understood as a continuum along which blends of involvement (that is more conducive to more fantasy-laden thinking) and detachment (that is more conducive to the production of more object-adequate knowledge) are located (Dunning, 1992; Elias, 1978). When generating any form of knowledge, therefore, Elias encouraged sociologists to temper their ambitions somewhat in the pursuit of the 'truth' and instead 'aspire to develop explanations that have a greater degree of adequacy than preceding explanations' (Murphy *et al.*, 2000, p. 94). In his attempt to develop more adequate explanations of social life, Elias outlined the ways in which researchers should approach the generation of data during their research. In particular, he drew attention to the well-recognized problems that sociologists have had to grapple with throughout the

development of the discipline, namely, that they are a part of the very thing that they are attempting to study: human relationships (Elias, 1987; Plummer, 2010). In that respect, Elias argued that with the exception of small babies, and among adults perhaps only insane people, human beings are all prone to thinking and acting in varying degrees of involvement and detachment. Thus, for Elias (1956, p. 237), sociologists:

Cannot cease to take part in, and to be affected by, the social and political affairs of their groups and their time. Their own participation and involvement, moreover, is itself one of the conditions for comprehending the problems they try and solve as scientists. For while one need not know, in order to understand the structure of molecules, what it feels like to be one of its atoms, in order to understand the functioning of human groups one needs to know, as it were, from inside how human beings experience their own and other groups, and one cannot know without active participation and involvement.

It is important to note, however, that Elias emphasized that the process of examining social relationships such as those characteristic of young footballers' lives is best achieved not directly, but by means of a 'detour *via* detachment' (Elias, 1956, 1987) in which researchers who are able to hold their ideological orientations 'in check', as it were, throughout the course of their research (Dunning, 1992). In doing so, Elias (1956, 1987) argued that sociologists are more likely to generate explanations that have a greater degree of object-adequacy than preceding explanations. The extent to which their research proves sociologically adequate, however, depends on the availability of the necessary material required to conduct research and, perhaps most importantly, the capacity of the researcher to combine simultaneously their ability to empathize with the people whom they are studying,

with a certain degree of detachment from them. That is, if sociologists are able and predisposed to do so, their ability to combine and balance their emotional attachments with the capacity to locate their research findings within a relatively detached framework will help them to avoid ‘going native’ (Dunning, 1992, 1999; Elias 1956, 1987) and develop more adequate explanations of the social relationships they are studying.

## **Summary**

The objective of this chapter has been to outline the key ‘sensitizing’ concepts of figurational sociology, together with other concepts derived from symbolic interactionist work, which provides the over-arching theoretical framework for this thesis. The concepts are also intended to help answer the research questions of the study in various ways. For example, in order to examine the realities of young players’ day-to-day working-lives within present-day Academies and CoE, it is important to understand the figurations and interdependency networks players comprise with others, including: teammates, coaches, Education and Welfare Officers, family members, and friends. In this regard, Elias’s game models concept, together with his relational and processual conceptualization of power, will be used to analyze the differential power relations that characterize the whole network of dynamic interdependencies within which players and other social groups are located. Elias’s game models analogy will also be employed to help examine the ways in which the social organization of professional football only exists through the more-or-less goal directed actions of individuals and groups who collectively make-up the various levels, or hierarchies, of the ‘game’ that constitutes the professional football figuration. Thus, to make adequate sociological sense of young players’ views and experiences of education and other welfare issues, players will be located within the social networks of interdependencies in which they

are bound up, and in which they are constrained to think and act in largely unplanned, but also intended, ways. This point merits further explanation.

It was noted earlier that players' views and experiences, and their interactions with significant others, will be used to help better understand the complex interrelationships between players' lives inside and outside of the club as aspects of their lives 'in the round', and not as isolated processes. To do so, it is important to focus not only on the values, priorities and deliberate intentions of players (individually or in groups), but also the unintended outcomes that emerge out of the tensions, conflicts and degrees of consensual elements that characterize players' relationships with others within their wider figurations. It is hoped that such an approach will also help anticipate some of the unintended outcomes that inevitably result from the combined actions of the groups involved, and the associated power struggles that accompany the provision of education and welfare programmes in professional football. By striving to achieve a greater understanding of the relational networks of which players are a part may have the associated benefit of developing a greater understanding of the possible side-effects of pursuing particular educational programmes and welfare policies in the game, and the potentially unrealistic nature of the football authorities' claimed aspirations for the promotion of players' well-being and performance. In this regard, developing some appreciation of the power structure of professional football has the potential advantage of sensitizing us to what is in fact within the realms of possibility, and what realistically the claimed emphasis on education and welfare within the game is likely to have on players' lives and experiences.

Exploring the interpretations players give of their circumstances and social situations requires sociologists to recognize that these accounts will ‘bear the stamp of higher ... (or) lesser detachment or involvement’ (Elias, 1987, p. 4) and thus possess varying degrees of reality-congruence. In this context, an awareness of the importance of obtaining appropriate blends of involvement and detachment throughout the research process, but particularly in the focused encounters with players, may help the researcher to remain appreciative of the need to follow-up inconsistencies in players’ responses to distinguish between the more-or-less mythical or reality-congruent interpretations they offered (Elias, 1956, 1987). This may be especially important when probing players’ tendencies to engage in both praise and blame gossip as they endeavour to make sense of their situations and relationships with others, particularly when discussing these with fellow teammates. A recognition of involvement and detachment in helping to make sense of the role played by human values in understanding the social world may also help to sensitize us to the ways in which researchers are unable to approach and conduct research in the human world from a totally objective position. In particular, as a football enthusiast studying players about whom I may have more-or-less preconceived ideas, it is also essential to subject my conceptions of the game to critical scrutiny as I undertake research with a view to develop more object-adequate knowledge about players, their lives, and the world of professional football more broadly. This is a theme that will be returned to in the next chapter, which explains how the theoretical assumptions of figural sociology underpinned the selection of the research methods that were used to help make sociological sense of the lives of young footballers and, in particular, their views and experiences of education and welfare in Academies and CoE.

## Chapter Three

### Research Methods

#### Introduction

The previous chapter outlined the main assumptions and ‘sensitizing’ concepts of figurational sociology and it was suggested that ‘sociology is not a practice, but an *attempt to understand*’ (Berger, 1963, p. 15; emphases in original) social life and the objects of sociological study: human relationships. In order to adequately understand these human figurations, sociological research has to incorporate methods appropriate for generating relevant data to help answer the research question of any sociological study. The objective of this chapter, therefore, is to outline and justify the two research methods – self-completion questionnaires and focus groups – that were employed in this study to provide a more adequate explanation of the lives of young professional football players. The chapter will also establish the rationale for the cross-sectional research design of the study, outline how the study was conducted, and how the data generated were analyzed.

#### Qualitative and quantitative research approaches

When discussing how one might conduct research in the social sciences it has become something of received wisdom to reflect upon the debate that surrounds the epistemological and ontological considerations of a researcher (Bryman, 2008; Denscombe, 2010). This is typically justified on the grounds that the epistemological and ontological orientation of the researcher will underpin the theory or theories they choose and, as a result, the research methodology and methods they employ to answer their research question. Within this context, the first section of this chapter discusses the alleged relationship between the

epistemological and ontological considerations of research and how this relates to wider debates about quantitative and qualitative research approaches, before offering a figurational critique of these issues as they relate to the present study.

### *Epistemological and ontological research considerations*

According to Bryman (2008), epistemology is a branch of philosophy concerned with exploring what constitutes acceptable knowledge and how one discovers and confirms this. Ontology, by contrast, is said to refer to the study of the nature of the world, including the socio-cultural aspects of that world (Bryman, 2008). Whilst both of these orientations to research have developed primarily as branches of philosophy, they each have implications for other disciplines such as sociology. Within sociology, it has been argued that among the most important epistemological considerations is ‘the question of whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles, procedures, and ethos as the natural sciences’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 13). A related ontological consideration stems from:

the question of whether social entities can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors. (Bryman, 2008, p. 18)

The question often asked by some sociologists, therefore, is: Is it possible, when studying human beings and the societies they form, to develop more object-adequate (Elias, 1978, 1987) forms of knowledge using methods most usually employed in the natural sciences?

As in philosophy, the essence of the ontological considerations relates to the study of the most fundamental of entities, which in sociology are human beings (individually and in groups) and the relationships human beings form with others. Attempting to outline how epistemological and ontological considerations relate to sociology, Roberts (2009, p. 83) notes that, 'whether we realise it or not, all sociological arguments rest upon an epistemological position' depending upon how one believes adequate knowledge regarding people and the relationships they form with others can be generated. Moreover, Roberts (2009, p. 188) argues that sociologists have, over time, 'done their own ontology' and that 'ontology is not a separate field within sociology but exists within sociology and social theory' as sociologists debate how to study humans as part of the social world more adequately.

There are said to be two main epistemological positions that can be taken when conducting research in the social sciences: positivism and interpretivism. Positivism, which 'was the dominant epistemological paradigm in social science from the 1930s through to the 1960s' (Gray, 2009, p. 18), is based upon the belief that 'the social world exists external to the researcher, and that its properties can be measured directly through observation'. In short, to take a positivist epistemological stance within sociology is to claim that the social world can be analyzed using the same methods as the natural sciences and that knowledge is only acceptable if it can be tested through the use of empirical experience (Gray, 2009). Common amongst advocates of this approach is the generation of scientific laws as a way of explaining how the social world works based on the assumption that 'both the natural and social worlds operate within a strict set of laws, which science had to discover through empirical inquiry' (Gray, 2009, p. 19). By applying methods from the natural sciences to the social world, the positivist approach is also said to be characterized by a number of other inter-related



assumptions that separate it from the interpretivist epistemological approach. Bryman (2008, p. 13), for example, argues that positivism involves the principle of deductivism, where ‘the purpose of theory is to generate hypotheses that can be tested and that will thereby allow explanations of laws to be assessed’.

Rather than explaining the social world through the methods of the natural sciences, it is argued that an interpretivist approach is underpinned by the belief that sociology is fundamentally different from the natural sciences (Bryman, 2008; Gray, 2009). Consequently, it is claimed that ‘the study of the social world therefore requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order’ (Bryman, 2008, p. 15). One of the primary differences in this regard is the notion that, as a human, a researcher is inevitably a part of the very social relationships they are exploring, and it is therefore impossible for science to be completely objective or detached (Elias, 1987). Moreover, interpretivists are said to favour an inductive approach in which theory is generated by research, rather a deductive approach that underpins positivism. In summary, Bryman (2008, p. 15: emphasises in original) argues that the different epistemological views of positivism and interpretivism stem from:

a division between an emphasis on the *explanation* of human behaviour that is the chief ingredient of the positivist approach the social sciences and the *understanding* of human behaviour. The latter is concerned with the empathic understanding of human action rather than with the forces that are deemed to act on it.

It was noted earlier that a central ontological consideration among sociologists is whether entities should be considered as having a reality external to social actors, or as constructs of the social world within which they exist (Bryman, 2008; Gray, 2009). In this regard, there are said to be two main ontological positions that are typically taken by social researchers. The first of these is objectivism, which is based upon the belief that social phenomena and their meanings have an existence that is independent of social actors. Bryman (2008) argues that studying society from this perspective centres on a study of an organization, or the organization of people, rather than the people themselves. In doing so, he claims that researchers who take an objectivist view 'are tending to the view that an organization has a reality that is external to the individuals who inhabit it' (Bryman, 2008, p. 18) and are thus more likely to adopt a more quantitative approach to their research. The ontological position of objectivism is also viewed as being consistent with the epistemological position of positivism and the alleged preferences for quantitative researchers to favour a deductive approach to the relationship between theory and research. This is because positivism is said to be based upon the assumption that there is an 'objective' reality to be investigated in the social and natural world (Bryman, 2008; Gray, 2009). Conversely, the second broad kind of ontological approach to research is that of constructionism, which is conventionally associated with qualitative research approaches (Bryman, 2008; Gray, 2009). Constructionists are said to take the view that social phenomena and their meanings are in a constant state of flux and are continually being impacted upon by social actors. In this regard, social entities are viewed as being constructed by the environment within which they exist, and advocates of this perspective prioritize the generation of theory through research that places particular place on people's interpretations of their actions and the social world (Bryman, 2008; Gray, 2009).

Whilst the debate surrounding epistemology and ontology has had an important impact on the ways in which social scientists have approached the research process and the study of human societies, for figurational sociologists many of the foregoing issues are based on a number of false assumptions and an inadequate conception of the development of human knowledge as a social process. The next section will briefly outline some key aspects of the figurational critique of conventional approaches to understanding the epistemological and ontological concerns of researchers, and the connection between theory and research, as these relate to the present study.

#### *Conventional research approaches: A critique*

Notwithstanding the conventional tendency among natural and social scientists to conceptualize the research process as a simple, linear process in which research questions are formulated on the basis of their epistemological and ontological preferences (before the preferred research methods are employed to generate relevant data for either a quantitative or qualitative study), many researchers are in practice less dichotomous in their approach (Bryman, 2008). Indeed, it is increasingly recognized that research approaches and their associated methods cannot simply be presented as a dichotomy, as being either ‘quantitative’ or ‘qualitative’, for it is clear that all research projects inevitably incorporates a blend of both approaches depending on the questions being asked (Brannen, 2005; Bryman, 2008). As Brannen (2005, p. 173) has noted, ‘qualitative and quantitative approaches are in practice interwoven into the research process’, and in the present study this is expressed in the use of more quantitative methods (e.g. self-completion questionnaires) alongside those conventionally described as being more qualitative (e.g. focus groups) in kind.

Conceptualizing the research approaches and methods employed in this study as lying upon a continuum along which ‘quantitative’ and ‘qualitative’ judgements are located, rather than as polar opposites, also means that the tendency to present so-called ‘epistemological’ and ‘ontological’ concerns in dichotomous terms is equally inadequate. Indeed, for figurational sociologists, ‘epistemology and ontology are so integrally related, they are so *interdependent*, there seems little sense in discussing them separately ... knowledge and reality are not separate entities; they are part of the same process’ (Bloyce, 2004, p. 146). The social process to which figurational sociologists refer in this respect is the development of human knowledge, which is explained in more detail elsewhere as being shared, developed and learned by many groups of people who comprise complex networks of interdependencies, rather than as the outcome of individuals acting in isolation from other human beings (Dunning, 1992; Elias, 1987; Kilminster, 1998). This is not to suggest, of course, that sociological studies such as the one reported in this thesis is devoid of any epistemological or ontological basis, for as explained earlier, both these concerns have informed the ways in which sociologists have approached their work (Roberts, 2009). It is clear, however, that as sociology has developed as a discipline it has become evident that the methods used often have to be ‘quite different from the natural sciences, because sociologists [are] themselves part of what they studied, namely, human society’ (van Krieken, 1998, p. 71). In the present study, which involves a young adult male researcher studying other young adult males, it was therefore essential to select appropriate research methods (i.e. self-completion questionnaires and focus groups) that could be used to shed light on the complexities of the lives of young footballers, rather than those methods that might be used in the natural sciences but which would be unlikely to generate data for this thesis.

The suggestion that quantitative and qualitative research investigations must adopt either an inductive or deductive approach to research in which theory is said to be prioritized over method and *vice-versa*, is also fundamentally flawed. As Elias (1978, p. 58) noted, ‘the separation of theory and method proves to be based on a misconception. The development of people’s conception of the subject matter is found to be inseparable from their conception of the method appropriate to its investigation’. In this respect, it is important to recognize that ‘*theory and methods are simply tools, means to an end*’ (Plummer, 2010, p. 97; emphases in the original), the end being greater understanding of social relationships and key aspects of human experience (e.g. young players’ views and experiences of education and welfare in professional football). The challenge for sociologists, and hence the current researcher, ‘is to develop a deep understanding of the empirical social world we live in through whatever routes this can be achieved best’ (Plummer, 2010, p. 97). The research methods that are selected to help achieve this should not therefore be allowed to dictate the nature of the problem to be investigated, which should always be based on a constant cross-fertilization of theory and evidence (Dunning, 1992; Elias, 1978) throughout all aspects of the research process, the main goal of which is the development of more reality-congruent explanations of the phenomena under investigation (Elias, 1978, 1987). Writing from a figurational perspective – though many sociologists of other theoretical persuasions would agree – Elias (1987) argued that sociologists should always seek to relate their observations to a body of theory and *vice-versa* as the only means by which to help contribute to, and build upon, existing funds of social-scientific knowledge. More specifically, he claimed that:

it is characteristic of ... scientific ... forms of solving problems that ... questions emerge and are solved as a result of an uninterrupted two-way traffic between two layers of knowledge; that of general ideas, theories or models and that of observations

and perceptions of specific events. The latter, if not sufficiently informed by the former, remains unorganised and diffuse; the former, if not sufficiently informed by the latter, remains dominated by feelings and imaginings. (Elias, 1987, p. 20)

Consequently, in the present study, the researcher sought to ensure that there was a constant interdependence between theory and evidence throughout all phases of the research process, for this was one of the ways in which more reality-congruent knowledge of young footballers' lives could be achieved.

### **Using mixed methods in social research**

Over the past thirty years or so, the amount of social-scientific research that has attempted to integrate both qualitative and quantitative research methods into a single study has steadily increased to the extent that, 'there can be little doubt that mixed methods research has moved forward a great deal in recent years' (Bryman, 2008, p. 8). Against the backdrop of an increasing trend towards using a mixed method approach, however, there is a dearth of literature that has sought to give guidance on the process of using mixed methods research in practice. Indeed, Wooley (2009, p. 8) argues that:

The problem is not only one of there being few pieces of mixed method research that have engaged with the aim of "genuine integration" ... but also that too little has been written about the research process and techniques by which this can be achieved.

Notwithstanding the growing popularity of mixed methods research, there is currently a 'tendency for the rationales for using multi-strategy research not to be thought through

sufficiently' (Bryman, 2006, p. 110) on the assumption that simply doing more research is bound to have beneficial consequences. It is important, therefore, to outline the rationale for the use of a mixed methods approach in this study, which, to reiterate, incorporated a self-completion questionnaire and focus groups as part of a cross-sectional research design in order to address the central sociological problem of this thesis.

According to Hammond (2005, p. 241), there are five main, interrelated, benefits often proposed by researchers for their choice of mixed methods research, which can be categorized in the following way:

- (a) initiation – discovering fresh perspectives through paradoxes and apparent contradictions;
- (b) triangulation – testing the convergence or validity of results;
- (c) complementary – elaboration, enhancement, illustration and clarification of results;
- (d) development – using the results from the first methods to inform, design and implement the second method; and
- (e) expansion – extending the breadth or scope of the project.

To some extent all five of the categories outlined by Hammond (2005) helped influence the selection of a mixed methods approach in the present study, though the 'initiation', 'complimentary' and 'expansion' justifications were of particular significance. Obtaining the views and experiences players had of education and welfare in professional football was deliberately intended to help identify the similarities and differences in their views, as well as any apparent contradictions and paradoxes therein. Self-completion questionnaires and focus groups were also selected on the basis that they complimented each other in a number of ways.

Firstly, as explained in more detail later, the questionnaires were completed by players before the focus groups took place and, as well as generating mainly quantitative data on a range of issues, this two-phased approach gave players an opportunity to begin thinking about the topics they would discuss in the focus groups. Indeed, when players completed the questionnaires, they did so in the same room as other players and the players had often begun discussing the topics within the questionnaire before the focus group had begun. Secondly, accessibility to the clubs was limited, so the questionnaires and focus groups had to be completed in a single trip in all cases. Although this prevented the researcher from analyzing the questionnaire responses before the focus groups were completed, it was nevertheless possible to clarify some of the information that had been gleaned from the questionnaires by encouraging players to briefly discuss some of the more pertinent points at the start of the focus group sessions. Thirdly, the use of questionnaires alongside the focus groups expanded the scope of the study, and the range of issues that could be explored in depth, more than if only one of those methods had been selected. The self-completion questionnaire, for example, provided the researcher with data on the kinds of activities players engaged in inside and outside their club, and provided important information about the educational programmes they were studying in a manner more adequate than that permitted by more qualitative methods (such as focus groups). The largely qualitative data generated by the focus groups, by contrast, helped the researcher to understand better players' experiences of education and welfare in the manner they claimed to do, than would be obtained by more quantitative methods. The strengths and limitations of both these methods are considered in more detail later, but it is worth noting at this stage that since the present study was designed to understand in greater detail players' lives, and especially their experiences of education and welfare, it was necessary to explore what they did, how often and for how long they did those things. As Wooley (2009, p. 8) has noted:



Mixed methods research questions are those that ask either what and how or what and why. In such cases both quantitative and qualitative approaches are of use: respectively, addressing the what and the how or why, providing a way of considering structures and processes, establishing relationships between variables and exploring the reasons behind those relationships, and thereby providing a means of bridging macro-micro levels of social analysis.

Thus, as Hammond (2005, p. 241) has claimed, ‘combining different methods is valuable (or pragmatic) because each approach provides a different approach on the topic’ and since ‘each approach has its own limitations or “imperfections”, which can be compensated for by using alternative methods’, mixed methods research designs can often help answer complex research questions such as those underpinning the present study.

As Gray (2009) has argued, however, the end product of such research is not always the same as the sum of the quantitative and qualitative parts that constitute it. Indeed, the outcomes of multi-strategy research are not always predictable and whilst ‘a decision about design issues may be made in advance and for the good of reasons, when the data are generated, surprising findings or unrealized potential in the data may suggest unanticipated consequences of combining them’ (Bryman, 2006, p. 99). This is a particular problem when it comes to interpreting data, for ‘puzzling and quite discrepant findings can emerge, adding more complexity rather than validation and congruence’ (Gray, 2009, p. 215) because researchers fail to pay sufficient attention to the degree to which different methods are integrated in the approach (Bryman, 2006; Gray, 2009). In this study, therefore, the researcher sought to ensure that the questionnaires and focus group were ‘integrated’ into the research design in

order to generate different kinds of data to address the various sub-questions that that emanated from the main research questions. In addition, whilst the researcher may have expected similar findings to emerge from the different methods, any disparity in the data generated by self-completion questionnaires and focus groups can nonetheless reveal a lot about the respondents (young footballers) and their activities (e.g. experiences of education programmes) being studied.

An additional potential practical limitation of adopting a mixed methods approach in the present study was the increased expense and time required to complete the research adequately. For example, as it was initially unclear at the design stage of the study whether the participating clubs would permit the researcher access to their Academy or CoE, it was also difficult to calculate the amount of time required to undertake the research. Yet, in employing a mixed methods approach that incorporated both self-completion questionnaires and focus groups, the amount of time required for each visit had to be between three and four hours, which increased the possibility that multiple visits to clubs would be required. As will become clear, it transpired that the researcher was, in the main, successful in negotiating with the various gatekeepers at the clubs (e.g. the Head of Academy or CoE) access to players for the required amount of time in just one visit.

The remaining sections of this chapter will outline how the general sociological concerns of this study, and the theoretical assumptions of figurational sociology in particular, underpinned the selection of self-completion questionnaires and focus groups, which were used for different purposes, in separate phases of the research process, to generate data pertinent to the research questions.

## **Self-completion questionnaires as a research tool**

Surveys can take a number of forms, but perhaps the most popular form is that of a self-completion questionnaire, which is the most widely used method by sociologists and other social scientists (Bryman, 2008; de Vaus, 2002; Roberts, 2009). Among the many benefits of self-completion questionnaires is their capacity to gather large amounts of data on a range of complex social behaviours (e.g. young players' experiences of working in adult-led workplaces such as professional football) in a relatively short space of time (de Vaus, 2002; Gray, 2009). Whilst many previous studies have attempted to explore the education provisions that are on offer within Academies and CoE and players' views and experiences of them (e.g. McGillivray & McIntosh, 2006; Monk, 2006; Monk & Russell, 2000), they have tended to focus upon education in isolation from other equally significant experiences (e.g. living away from home, playing whilst injured) that come to compromise players' welfare, and *vice-versa*. The purpose of this study, therefore, was to contextualize players' views and experiences as aspects of their broader occupational experiences by examining their lives 'in the round', rather than as separate and isolated features of their working lives.

To help examine players' lives 'in the round', the main objective of the four-part self-completion questionnaire used in this study (Appendix 1) – which took approximately 20 minutes to complete – was to gather data on the types of activities players engaged in during their day-to-day lives within their clubs, the amount of time they spent doing them, and with whom they did them. The questions were based upon the findings of the existing literature reviewed in Chapter One, and matters of interest to the researcher. The first section was entitled, 'You and your football career' and generated basic data on players' biographies, which included their age, where and with whom they lived, the club for whom they currently

played, and how long they had been attending their present club. These data were vital prerequisites for making more adequate sense of players' views and experiences of the football world and early career trajectories, which have hitherto been largely ignored in the academic literature that seeks to understand players' experiences of education and welfare. The second section of the questionnaire asked players about the various activities in which they were engaged by their clubs. In particular, this section focused on their physical (e.g. fitness and body fat tests, supplement use) and non-physical training (e.g. mental skills training), the educational components of the ASE programme they were following, and other performance-related issues.

As well as exploring players' experiences of education that was delivered as part of the ASE programme in their clubs, it was important to develop an understanding of the role, if any, education played in their lives outside of the immediate confines of the club. The third section of the questionnaire, therefore, was intended to differentiate players whose experiences were restricted to the ASE programme, from those who may have been pursuing other educational qualifications in their spare time, for very little is known about these two interrelated aspects of players' lives. In doing so, this section examined the kinds of qualifications players were studying for, where and when they did them, and the time they spent studying for them. The fourth and final section of the questionnaire explored several key aspects of players' leisure time. In particular, they were asked about their involvement in a range of commercialized leisure activities (e.g. going to the cinema, visiting a pub or club) and engagement in media-oriented leisure (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, MySpace). Thereafter, players were asked about their use of alcohol and cigarettes to shed light on their involvement in drug-oriented leisure and to compare these with the leisure habits of other males.

By dividing the questionnaire into four sections and focusing, where relevant, on players' relationships with significant others, the researcher began to examine the various dimensions of players' footballing and leisure lives, and how these were structured by the figurations that they comprised with others. This was because one of the central premises of figurational sociology, which informs the present study, is that 'human individuals can only be understood in their *interdependencies* with each other, as a part of networks of social relations, or what he [Elias] often referred to as "figurations"' (van Krieken, 1998, p. 6); original emphasis. Whilst the questionnaire was carefully designed to help shed light on players' lives 'in the round', by their very nature questionnaires focus largely on individuals as *Homo clausus* (Elias, 1978), as separate and in isolation from their complex interdependencies they form with other human beings. In other words, questionnaires can help generate basic data about young players' lives but since their responses are subsequently grouped together 'into all sorts of social categories' (Goudsblom, 1977, p. 62) the complex interdependencies that characterize players' social relations may 'never come into the foreground' (Goudsblom, 1977, p. 62) without careful analysis and use of other methods.

It would be misleading to assume, therefore, that the quantitative ('statistical') data generated by the self-completion questionnaire used in this study were, of themselves, the most adequate way of enhancing understanding of players' experiences of education and welfare within professional football. Indeed, relying exclusively on such data was 'undoubtedly too narrow and distorted a view of the sociological task' (Elias, 1978, p. 132), since doing so runs the risk of sacrificing sociological significance to statistical significance (Goudsblom, 1977). Statistical data 'contain only isolated fragments of knowledge' (Goudsblom, 1977, p. 40) and whilst they may point to a particular pattern of behaviour or correlation, they cannot in themselves provide an explanation of those behaviours. As Berger (1963, p. 22) has put it:

Statistical data by themselves do not make sociology. They become sociology only when they are sociologically interpreted, put within a theoretical frame of reference that is sociological. Simple counting, or even correlating different items that one counts, is not sociology.

Although statistical data ‘by themselves do not make sociology’, this is not to say ‘that there is no place in sociological research for statistical studies dealing with common features in the behaviour of members of certain groups’ (Elias, 1978, p. 132) such as young footballers. Rather, as the following three chapters indicate, in many cases statistical data ‘are indispensable’ (Elias, 1978, p. 132) and can be very useful in answering certain sociological questions (Berger, 1963; Elias, 1978; Plummer, 2010) of the kind that underpin the present study. In particular, as will become clear, the basic statistical data reported in this thesis played an essential part – ‘that of indicators, pointing to specific variations in the way (young) people are caught up in a network of relations’ (Elias, 1978, p. 98-9) – that were examined more fully in the focus groups that followed.

#### *Procedure: recruiting clubs*

The sampling frame for this study – which was given ethical approval by the Faculty of Applied Health Sciences Research Ethics Committee in May 2009 – was all those players who were registered on a full-time basis in an Academy or CoE in all 92 clubs who competed in the top four divisions of the Football League in England. Since two clubs did not operate an Academy or CoE at the time the study was conducted, the remaining 90 clubs were contacted by letter in May and June 2009. The names and contact details of each Head of Academy and CoE Manager, together with the name of each Head of Education (or member

of staff who was responsible for education where no Head of Education was present) were gathered from the club's official website, and were subsequently verified by telephone where necessary. The decision to contact Heads of the Academies and CoE in the first instance was based on the realization that, as Brackenridge (2007, p. 67) notes, professional football clubs are often close-knit, very traditional, male-dominated environments characterized by 'authoritarian leadership' and an 'almost collusive secrecy and suspicion of "outsiders"'. In view of the researcher's status as an 'outsider' it was essential to make initial contact with whoever was 'in charge' of the Academy or CoE. Not only was this person most likely to be able to facilitate access to clubs and their players, this approach avoided conveying the impression that the researcher was in some way seeking to circumvent the authority of decision-makers in key positions of power in pursuit of recruiting players. Indeed, whilst the Heads of Academy or CoE Managers were in a position to help facilitate the research, they were also able to prevent the study being conducted should they disapprove of what was being proposed. In this regard, the initial contact with clubs sought to operate within the rather unequal, largely hierarchical, structures of power and relational constraints that characterize professional football (Brackenridge, 2007; Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006) to ensure that access to the participants was likely to be granted.

Each club representative was sent a letter outlining what was required of the club should they be involved in the study, a short synopsis of the study, a tear-off reply slip to indicate whether they were prepared to be involved in the research, and a stamped addressed envelope in which to return the slip. Once the letters had been posted, it took approximately two weeks for the first reply to arrive and over the course of the next month or so, 33 letters, seven phone calls and three emails were received from 43 different clubs, 28 of which expressed an interest, a response rate of 48%. This response rate was higher than expected, especially from

one single mail shot sent to a traditionally anti-academic setting from a previously unknown researcher working at a university. Upon receiving each letter or phone call, each club was contacted by phone to organize a visit and to remind it of the purpose of the research, for the study did not appear to rank particularly highly in their list of priorities.

Of the 28 clubs who originally expressed an interest in participating in the study, 21 clubs and their players were eventually recruited to, and completed, the research by the end of October 2009. The reasons why the remaining seven clubs withdrew their original willingness to participate in the research, and over which the researcher had no control, were: the first team manager being sacked; the appointment of a high-profile club manager; recent unwanted media attention over alleged irregularities in the club's youth system; the commencement of paternity leave by the CoE Manager; the club entering administration; and, in two instances, an inability to accommodate the requirements of the researcher. In the case of the latter, this related to the requirement that the data generation phase was intended to take place at the beginning of a season, which is often the most demanding time in the Academy or CoE when, amongst other things, new players have just arrived and are adjusting to their new professional workplace, some players have arrived on trial, training is at its most frequent during pre-season, rest days are scarce, and managers and coaches are primarily concerned with assessing the abilities of their players.

#### *Participants and procedure: questionnaire respondents*

Of the 21 clubs recruited to the study, five were in the Premier League, eight were in the Championship, three were in League One, and the remaining five were in League Two (see



Table 3.1). At the time the study was conducted, 11 clubs (5 Premier League; 6 Championship) operated an Academy and 10 (2 Championship; 3 League One; 5 League Two) ran a CoE. A total of 161 players were contracted to a club with an Academy (79 Premier League; 82 Championship) and a further 142 players (27 Championship; 45 League One; 70 League Two) attended a club with a CoE.

Once the clubs had agreed access to the players, the questionnaires were distributed to the players in a variety of quiet rooms, including dressing rooms, classrooms, club boardrooms, conference rooms, and canteens. All players completed the questionnaires having received a written and verbal guarantee of anonymity that neither their name, nor that of the club, would be disclosed and that there was nowhere on the questionnaire for them to identify these. Although they were encouraged to complete their questionnaires on their own, and not to consult others for their responses, in practice and perhaps inevitably, some did speak to each other on occasions. Whilst perhaps not ideal in methodological terms, there were a number of advantages of allowing players to engage in conversation about the questionnaire. These included their desire to clarify some of the answers about the key issues explored (e.g. the titles of their educational courses), their wish to seek reassurance about the anonymity of their responses, and the facilitation of discussion between them of the kinds of topics to be explored in the focus groups. Not restricting players' discussion of the contents of the questionnaire with each other, and the researcher, also appeared to help engender a greater degree of trust and rapport so that they would 'open up' and discuss their views and experiences in a relatively informal manner without fear of reprisal. Adopting a non-authoritarian approach also appeared to encourage players to engage in the follow-up focus groups which, typically, 'require a considerable amount of cooperation and enthusiasm from

**Table 3.1 Participating clubs**

<b>Club Number</b>	<b>Division</b>	<b>Academy or CoE</b>	<b>Number of Questionnaires</b>	<b>Number of Focus Groups</b>
<b>1</b>	League Two	CoE	16	2
<b>2</b>	League Two	CoE	8	1
<b>3</b>	League One	CoE	14	2
<b>4</b>	League One	CoE	15	2
<b>5</b>	Premier League	Academy	14	2
<b>6</b>	League Two	CoE	14	2
<b>7</b>	Championship	Academy	9	1
<b>8</b>	Championship	Academy	16	2
<b>9</b>	Premier League	Academy	14	2
<b>10</b>	League One	CoE	16	2
<b>11</b>	Premier League	Academy	17	2
<b>12</b>	League Two	CoE	18	2
<b>13</b>	Championship	CoE	17	2
<b>14</b>	Championship	Academy	16	2
<b>15</b>	Championship	Academy	20	2
<b>16</b>	Championship	Academy	9	2
<b>17</b>	Championship	Academy	12	2
<b>18</b>	Premier League	Academy	11	2
<b>19</b>	Championship	CoE	10	2
<b>20</b>	Premier League	Academy	23	3
<b>21</b>	League Two	CoE	14	2
<b>Total</b>			<b>303</b>	<b>41</b>

participants' (Gray, 2009, p. 389), especially when they had already invested time completing the questionnaires.

#### *Analysis of questionnaire data*

Once completed, the questionnaires were collected by the researcher and placed into an envelope that was marked with an identification number corresponding to the club at which

they had been distributed. Upon returning to the University, the questionnaires were scanned into a personal computer using Formic software and each respondent was assigned a unique identification number. Thereafter, the respondents were grouped according to their club affiliation in order to use this as an independent variable in the subsequent analyses. The data were then uploaded to Excel where the values identified by the Formic scanner were hand-checked by the researcher (row-by-row) against the values entered in the original questionnaires to verify the accuracy of the data. The questionnaires generated quantitative data on the lives of the players inside and outside of their respective Academies and CoE. These data, in the form of frequency counts, were analyzed via cross-tabulation of the specific variables (e.g. educational programmes studied and frequency of alcohol consumption) by, in certain instances, independent factors such as club affiliation and respondent.

#### *Limitations of self-completion questionnaires*

The limitations of self-completion questionnaires have been well documented (Bryman, 2008; de Vaus, 2002) and were borne in mind when interpreting the data presented in the following three chapters. It is now recognized, for example, that questionnaire respondents tend to over-report some lifestyle behaviours (e.g. the amount of time spent exercising or studying), and to under-estimate others (e.g. consumption of legal and illegal drugs) (Bryman, 2008; de Vaus, 2002). It is also clear that there are several difficulties with respondents' memory lapses, for all 'people cannot be relied on to recall accurately their subjective states (opinions and attitudes) at earlier points in their lives' (Roberts, 2009, p. 152). This is particularly true when the recall period is long, the activity being discussed is not salient, and the behaviours under discussion are not habitual (Bryman, 2008; de Vaus,

2002). Wherever possible, therefore, the self-completion questionnaire in this study used short time-frames (e.g. past weekly or monthly measures of leisure activity engagement), but when exploring aspects of players' early biographies (e.g. previous clubs attended) it was important to adopt longer time-frames to capture all of the relevant details of their careers.

Another possible limitation of the self-completion questionnaire used in this study was its length, for it is usually recommended that questionnaires are kept as short as possible to, among other things, enhance the response rate and sustain respondent interest (Bryman, 2008). Given the researcher's desire to investigate the complex interdependencies that exist between the various dimensions of players' lives, however, this was an inevitable limitation of the study design. Shortening the questionnaire would have meant isolating particular aspects of players' lives (e.g. their educational experiences) from other dimensions (e.g. their leisure behaviours), which would have restricted the researcher's ability to use the data generated in any meaningful way.

### **Focus groups as a research tool**

One of the main reasons for selecting focus groups was because they provided an opportunity for players to 'discuss a certain issue as members of a group, rather than simply as individuals' (Bryman, 2008, p. 473). By attempting to replicate the kinds of social contexts in which players come to form their impressions of their everyday experiences as footballers, focus groups thus enabled the researcher to understand more adequately the ways in which players 'in conjunction with one another construe the general topics in which the researcher (was) interested' (Bryman, 2008, p. 475). In seeking 'to understand the reasoning behind the

views and opinions that are expressed by group members' (Denscombe, 2010, p. 353), focus groups also allowed the facilitator and moderator, in particular, to focus upon the interaction between the group, as well as the answers given to the questions asked. The very nature of focus groups, together with the loosely structured and relaxed quality that often characterizes them (Kitzinger, 1994; Roulston, 2010), helps facilitate interaction between group members and can help researchers understand more adequately the views and experiences expressed by participants. Moreover, encouraging discussion among group members often enables the researcher to focus on individuals, and the whole group, to probe them not only about their personal interests but also the common experiences they recall in relation to similar issues (e.g. life as an aspiring professional footballer) (Kitzinger, 1994; Roulston, 2010). This was of particular importance for the present study since the researcher was centrally concerned with identifying the differential experiences of group members, as well as the similarities between the responses given. Focus groups therefore provided the researcher with an opportunity to examine how players:

argue with each other and challenge each other's views. This process of arguing means that the researcher may stand a chance of ending up with more realistic accounts of what people think, because they are forced to revise their views. (Bryman, 2008, p. 475)

On a theoretical level, focus groups were also selected on the premise that young footballers are not self-contained, isolated, and separate from other people (Elias, 1978), but are instead 'part of complex and overlapping social, familial and collegiate networks: Personal beliefs are not cut off from public discourses and individual behaviour does not happen in a cultural

vacuum' (Kitzinger, 1994, p. 173). For figural sociologists and other social scientists, conducting focus groups with young footballers enables the researcher to help identify patterns which are not peculiar to a single individual player or group but which are shared, to a greater or lesser degree, by players who share a common social situation. In the present study, this required the researcher to recognize patterns and processes that characterized groups of players in their particular social networks or figurations (Elias, 1987), and to identify the potential significance of these for understanding players' thoughts and experiences of education and welfare within their respective clubs.

Generating data on the networks of interdependencies in which an individual player and the group of players as a whole were involved, as well as the situations in which they found themselves, enabled the researcher to use focus groups as a means of identifying and comparing the participants' various 'I-' and 'we-' perspectives (Elias, 1987; Goudsblom, 1977) that suffuse their individual and group habituses (Dunning, 2002). This is not to say, however, that the 'I-' and 'we-' perspectives players themselves offer for their thoughts and behaviours, and the social meanings these had for them and other people, should be accepted uncritically. Unless subject to critical scrutiny, these views may be contradictory and be misleading and may contain elements of deliberate falsification or retrospective rationalizations that serve to reinforce players' preferred impressions about their own and others' actions (Goudsblom, 1977). In this regard, whilst using focus groups enabled an exploration of players' 'I-' and 'we-' perspectives that were important elements of the figurations in which they find themselves, it was also important to examine their "they"-perspectives which show the figuration from a greater distance, and may thereby offer a fuller view of how the intentions and actions of the various groups are interlocked' (Goudsblom, 1977, p. 181). This, therefore, required the researcher to continuously combine his ability to

empathize with players with a certain critical degree of detachment from them (Elias, 1987). For reasons explained later, however, there are several challenges faced by sociologists when seeking to maintain and combine an effective balance between their involvement and detachment (Elias, 1956, 1987) as they seek to place themselves within the world of experience of those whom they study, and convey something of the language and meanings young people give to their social actions (Goudsblom, 1977).

#### *Participants and procedure: focus groups*

As Table 3.1 indicates, in total, 41 focus groups were conducted with between 4 and 10 players at each of the 21 clubs. For the most part, two focus groups were held in each year group, one with a group of first year players, and one with players in the second year of their scholarship or apprenticeship. Dividing players in this way allowed the researcher to examine the differential experiences recalled by players at different stages of their process of trying to secure a professional contract. Although it was intended that two focus groups would be held at each club, in two clubs (1 Championship; 1 League Two) players in their first year were unavailable to participate in the study, and in one PL club the unusually high number of players meant that three focus groups were organized over two separate visits to the club.

Each focus group lasted for between 45 and 60 minutes and was conducted in the same location where the questionnaires had been completed beforehand. Each took place without the presence of anyone else at the club and were conducted by the researcher (who acted as the facilitator) and supported by the Lead Supervisor (who, in the role of moderator, acted as a scribe and managed the recording of each session) who introduced themselves on first-

name terms. The focus groups were audio-recorded with the permission of the clubs and players themselves. Players were reminded that anything they disclosed during the focus group was completely anonymous and were told that the audio recording could be stopped at any time should they desire this for any reason. This was particularly important for some players who sought reassurance that their answers would not be revealed to coaches and other club staff since they felt the disclosure of potentially sensitive, or controversial, matters could undermine their chances of securing a professional contract. The researcher sought, therefore, to convince the players to 'buy in' to the research and to persuade them that it was worth engaging with the focus group without fear of things 'getting back' to others in the club, which as Chapter Six makes clear, was a key theme identifiable in players' views about daily club life.

In order to reassure players of the anonymity of their responses, three principle strategies were adopted to maximize the researcher's 'intimate familiarity' (Goudsblom, 1977, p. 61) with them. Firstly, the researcher adopted the view that, having never had the opportunity to be a player himself, he was interested in finding out from their perspective the realities of being a youth team player. Secondly, having formed the view that players had few people in the Academy or CoE who were willing to listen to what they had to say, the researcher positioned himself as someone to whom they could express their views freely. In retrospect, this was one of the most important aspects of the focus groups since many of the players had a number of personal and collective concerns they wished to talk about, but rarely had the chance to discuss them with club staff for fear of being perceived as complaining, as being ungrateful, and above all as someone who is unlikely to cope with the demands of being a professional footballer. The focus groups thus appeared to provide players with a forum for getting things 'off their chest' and their enthusiasm towards the group discussion increased



when they realized that they were permitted to discuss whatever they wanted without fear of what they said being disclosed to authority figures in the club. Finally, in view of the players' sensitivities towards, and concern with, discussing their views and experiences every attempt was made to convince them that neither of the researchers were in positions of authority within the game of football, that the research was being undertaken at the University of Chester, and that it was not in anyway associated with the FA, FL, or any other organization such as the PFA. Overall, as Roderick (2006, p. 7) observed in relation to his study of professional players, it was important to reassure players that 'their comments, whether positive or negative, would not be traceable to them. If they had not received this type of assurance they may not have responded to questions so unguardedly'.

Each focus group began with a brief, standardized explanation of the nature of the discussion and how it related to the questionnaire that the players had completed previously. Although the focus groups were conducted with 'pre-existing networks and groups' (Roulston, 2010, p. 43) of players who were already known to each other, the researcher endeavoured to familiarize himself with each group member by opening each session with participants' self-introductions. The main 'ground rules for talk' (Roulston, 2010, p. 43) were then outlined to the participants who were told that whilst the objective of the focus group was to enable them to discuss, in a relatively informal way, their views and experiences, only one person should try to speak at any time and that no one had to put up their hand to talk.

Each focus group was divided into four main sections (Appendix 2), but given the dynamic process of questioning (Kitzinger, 1994; Roulston, 2010), all of the issues discussed were not always covered in the same order or depth. Typically, however, the first part of the focus groups centred on 'life at the Academy or CoE' and contained a number of simple, but

informative, questions in order to offer the players the opportunity to settle and relax (Denscombe, 2010). In this respect, players were asked to outline what a typical day was like in their Academy or CoE, before moving on to describe their general feelings of life as a young footballer, and the jobs they were expected to undertake whilst at their club. The focus groups then examined the relationships players had with others inside (e.g. club management and teammates) and outside (e.g. friends and family) the club and the expectations they had of these significant others. In the third part, discussion was elicited on players' thoughts and experiences of the education components of the ASE programme and other welfare-related matters. In particular, the line of questioning focused on: players' schooling and early experiences of education; their perceptions of the content and relevance of their educational courses; the relationships between players and those who deliver their educational programmes; and the ways in which players managed to combine their educational commitments alongside their development in footballing terms. The final section of the focus groups investigated players' lives away from football, including: their experiences of moving away from home (where relevant); the changing nature of their relationships with peers and family; and how their life has changed, if at all, since becoming a full-time players. At the end of the session, the facilitator and moderator thanked each of the participants and re-emphasized that everything they had said would remain anonymous and that only the two researchers would have access to the audio recordings and accompanying transcripts.

#### *Analysis of focus group data*

The recordings of the 41 focus groups were transcribed verbatim, and then analyzed for particular phrases and themes within the players' responses that gave an indication of the ways in which they viewed their experiences of Academy or CoE life and, in particular, their

educational courses and other welfare-related issues. As Roulston (2010, p. 150-51; emphases in the original) has noted, the thematic analysis of any interview data often includes the following interrelated processes:

*data reduction*, through applying codes to the data ... or elimination of repetitive or irrelevant data ... in order to define conceptual categories; *categorization of data*, through sorting and classification of the codes or data into thematic groupings or clusters, and ... *reorganization of the data into thematic representations* of findings through a series of assertions and interpretations.

By reading each transcript on three separate occasions, the researcher firstly identified, by hand, a number of ‘in-vivo’ codes, which are ‘derived directly from words and phrases uttered by the participant’ (Roulston, 2010, p. 151), before identifying ‘codes relating to the research questions posed’ (Roulston, 2010, p. 151) that are commonly known as ‘analytic codes’. To that end, the ‘in-vivo’ codes developed by the researcher included ‘big time’, ‘being injured’, ‘pro’, ‘busy’, ‘sacrifice’, ‘attitude’, ‘bollocking’, and ‘things getting back’, while the ‘analytic’ codes incorporated terms such as ‘pain and injury’, ‘abuse’, ‘welfare’, and ‘education’. By cross-checking the codes made on earlier transcriptions against the codes assigned to later ones, the ‘in-vivo’ and ‘analytic’ codes were then ‘adjusted, collapsed, and revised’ (Roulston, 2010, p. 153) into categories of data and included, for example, ‘culture of football’, ‘education’, ‘welfare’, ‘relationship with coach’, ‘relationship with EWO’, ‘leisure’, and ‘friends’. These categories were then considered in relation to key theoretical concepts such as power, figurations, interdependence, ‘I-’ ‘we-’ and ‘they-’ perspectives and habitus. These sensitizing concepts were used to help arrange the categories of data into the

key themes that were indicative of the differential views and experiences participants recalled in the focus groups. The main themes, which are discussed in later chapters of this thesis, included: young players' socialization into certain cultural expectations within professional football; the importance of making sacrifices; the importance of having a good attitude and not being seen as 'big time'; education provisions being boring and the how the welfare of young players is often compromised as a consequence of the culture that surrounds professional football.

### **Limitations of focus groups**

Throughout all of the focus groups held as part of this study, each group member was encouraged to talk as openly and freely as possible about their personal and collective interests as these related to the research themes. It is possible, however, that some participants were 'uncomfortable in presenting their views publically' (Roulston, 2010, p. 40), especially when those views may have been unpopular (e.g. expressing an interest in education) or controversial (e.g. revealing an allegiance to a particular member of club staff or teammate) among other group members. Thus, whilst it might be claimed that the information players provided in focus groups would have been different if they were interviewed individually, this does not mean that they were 'necessarily providing untruthful information' (Roulston, 2010, p. 38). Rather, the answers they gave were inevitably the social products of group interaction in which players:

provide comments that orient to what others have said, as well as tailor their accounts in particular ways to other group members as over-hearing audiences. In a group,

people provide particular self-representations which may differ from those provided in a one-on-one setting. (Roulston, 2010, p. 38)

Whilst the players who already knew one another brought ‘pre-established relationships to the interaction’ (Roulston, 2010, p. 39), it is impossible to determine the impact these had on their inclination to ‘speak their minds’ (Denscombe, 2010) or modify their comments about the issues under discussion. For this reason, focus groups may be criticized by some researchers because of the tendency for group members (e.g. young footballers) to engage in a variety of impression management techniques (Goffman, 1963) that expressed and presented their preferred self-identities, or ‘selves’, in socially acceptable ways. As Roulston (2010, p. 39) has noted, it is almost inevitable that ‘participants are likely to orient to others within the group according to existing relationships’, and will often ‘enact particular identities occupied outside the group and position their perspectives in particular ways for other members of the group’. That focus groups provided the opportunity for players to engage in ‘face work’ (Goffman, 1959) during these ‘focused encounters’ (Goffman, 1961) is, however, arguably one of the key advantages of using them in sociological studies of this kind, for they help shed important light on processes of interaction and negotiation that typically characterize every day social relations (Chapter Two).

This having been said, as noted earlier, the accounts players gave of their working lives in professional football life during the focus groups were likely to be characterized by varying blends of ideology and realistic observation. What was required by the researcher, therefore, was an appreciation of the ways in which focus groups were socially constructed and negotiated situations (Goffman, 1961) in which the more-or-less mythical, more-or-less

fantasy, views expressed by players needed to be identified from those which appeared detached to a greater degree (Elias, 1978, 1987). The remaining chapters of this thesis seek to identify the interpretations players gave of their situations, and of their experiences, by constantly relating theoretical observations to empirical data and *vice-versa* in the hope of providing a relatively detached and object-adequate explanation of them.

### **Doing sociological research in professional Academies and CoE**

Reflecting on her experiences of researching child welfare in professional football on behalf of the FA, Brackenridge (2007, p. 1) has noted that:

Sometimes in the life of a researcher there is a moment that takes their breath away. This is very rare, for research is mostly a long-drawn-out, slow process filled with administration and tedium, hours of planning, budgeting, analysing figures and words, and writing, editing, and rewriting.

This description of the research process, and particularly the various administrative and writing tasks one must undertake, is one that neatly captures my own experiences of doing research in the ‘closed’ occupational environment of professional football. For reasons that will become clear, much of the time I spent on the project reported in this thesis was dedicated to planning and writing-up the research; I spent comparatively little time ‘in the field’ and in the context of what is (misleadingly) seen by many people as the ‘glamorous’ work of the professional game. Yet, on reflection, the short window of opportunity that I was afforded when undertaking my research, and especially the anticipation of undertaking the

practical aspects of the project, were amongst the highlights of my time as an early career researcher (and, it must be added, as a fan) in this rather peculiar environment. Indeed, for someone who has enjoyed a keen interest in professional football from a very early age, when hours were spent watching, playing and talking about football, the prospect of visiting professional football clubs' Academies and CoE only added to my initial enthusiasm. As the planning of the project unfolded, however, the anticipation of 'getting my hands dirty' as a sociologist subsided, giving way as it did to the anxiety I routinely experienced as the realisation of what I was about to embark upon became clearer as each day passed. Of particular concern, was the extent to which I might be able to actually conduct the study as planned. How clubs would be recruited for the study was a dominant feature of early discussions with my Lead Supervisor. What would be the course of action if no club wanted to take part in the study? And is it even possible to undertake focus groups and questionnaires within the dynamic contexts that characterize Academies or CoE? Attending meetings with representatives from leading football organizations only heightened my anxiety, for it became clear that they could not be relied upon to help facilitate access to Academies and CoE in the manner I required. Somewhat worryingly at the time, these meetings were futile and I was left reflecting upon the possibility that I might not be able to access the clubs. On reflection, however, being faced with these dilemmas further enthused me and helped convince me that the study was worth undertaking despite the practical difficulties involved. Whilst I initially viewed the problems of accessing clubs in largely negative terms, I learnt to view what were once apparently insurmountable difficulties as a rare opportunity to undertake research through which I could claim to add to the body of knowledge in the sociology of football. In this respect, I am now of the opinion that the existence of these kinds of challenges should be precisely why a researcher *should* endeavour to study 'closed' social worlds such as

professional football, rather than acquiesce and assume that it would be possible given the difficulties involved.

With this in mind, it is my intention in this section to highlight some of the realities of undertaking sociological research within professional football Academies or CoE. In doing so, I hope to shed some light on how different the experience of doing research ‘on the ground’ is compared to the numerous misleading and highly proceduralized accounts of ‘how to do research’ that is routinely offered in conventional social science methods books. In particular, I seek to highlight: the difficulties of gaining access to and working in professional football; the problems associated with obtaining data from trainee footballers within an Academy or CoE setting; the difficulties involved in striking a balance between empathy and detachment with participants; a number of other methodological experiences I am able to reflect upon having undertaken a doctoral thesis in this way.

### *Gaining access to clubs*

Whilst researching immigration reform activism in the USA, Armitage (2008, p. 156) noted that ‘immigration reform activists were reluctant to participate because, as one respondent put it, they perceived a history of having been “unfairly maligned” by journalists and academics’. In a not dissimilar way, professional football, including youth football, has been party to a similar process. As Chapter 1 of this thesis indicated, the ways in which the Academy and CoE system have been criticized means that it is not unreasonable to suggest that, in the case of professional football, ‘misrepresentation [had] ... fostered emotional hostility against the academic or journalistic fields, [and] thus complicated the research’ (Armitage 2008, p. 174).



In light of these considerations, a decision was taken to contact Heads of the Academies and CoE in the first instance for, as noted earlier, those inside professional football clubs are frequently suspicious of ‘outsiders’ (Brackenridge, 2007). Given this context and my status as an ‘outsider’, it seemed appropriate that the initial course of action should be to make contact with whoever was in charge of the Academy or CoE. Not only were they most likely to be able to facilitate access to club, I also did not want to convey the impression to anyone that I was in some way hiding information or attempting to circumvent and undermine the authority the Head of Academy or CoE in pursuit of the players. Understandably, it seemed reasonable to suggest that Academy and CoE managers would not be pleased should they learn of my visit from someone else, at short notice or, perhaps worse, upon my arrival, since this may have jeopardized the prevented me from researching there. Notwithstanding these initial fears and concerns, the majority of the clubs in this study were accommodating both of me and the requests I made of them. In the main, the Head of Academies and CoE, EWOs, and Coaches, whom I met as part of the study showed an interest in what I was researching and went out of their way to help ensure the research could take place by, among other things, altering schedules, providing me access to rooms and equipment, and most important of all leaving me alone with the players. Of course, it is only possible to speculate about their reasons for doing this. I may have been lucky. It may have been that the time at which the research was conducted was a relatively quiet period in the season when there were comparatively fewer competitive pressures on players and coaches, and decisions about players who may or may not be awarded full-time professional contracts was around six months away. That a number of the clubs wished to be contacted with the findings of the study may also suggest that some of those involved in youth football may not be as anti-academic as they perhaps have been in the past, or is commonly assumed. It is a moot point whether this was the case.

### *Conducting research in Academies and CoE*

As noted above, the process of gaining access to clubs was easier than I had originally anticipated prior to the commencement of the research. The same could not be said in relation to the process of distributing the questionnaires and holding focus groups, as well as visiting clubs. This was, as expected, fraught with a number of problems that continually required me to reflect upon and adapt my actions while attempting to maintain the standards required in relation to, among other things, ethics and good research principles. Of particular significance were the travel demands that visiting the number of clubs who agreed to participate in the study posed; this phase of the research required me and the Lead Supervisor to travel 5,350 miles, often by car, and sometimes by train. Although this meant that the sample of clubs was distributed across a wide geographical area, it also meant that travelling to the clubs often resulted in setting off from Chester at half past five or six o'clock in the morning and returning late at night; on one occasion it was approaching ten o'clock in the evening when we arrived back at the University campus. The impact of this on the research cannot be under-estimated not least because it meant very little else other than the visiting the clubs to speak to players could be accomplished in that period of time. Travelling such distances also meant that I had to take into account other variables such as heavy traffic at rush hour or accidents, which are out of the control of the researcher. Indeed, one of the visits to a PL club had to be abandoned and rescheduled by a phone call from the motorway because we were trapped in the traffic from a music festival being staged in the same region and would be unable to make our appointment with the club who had a fixture the next day.

One of the major issues that researchers who go out into a different environment in order to conduct their research have to contend with, to a much greater extent than researchers who

are able to conduct their studies in laboratories, for example, is the diverse range of scenarios with which they have to deal. My experience within professional football clubs was no different as I was faced with having to adapt my approaches to the research in order to undertake the study in different settings. The questionnaires and focus groups, for example, were conducted in different places in different clubs, which impacted upon how the players approached the research and meant I had to adapt my approach to them in order to get the players to 'open-up' to me. Some focus groups were conducted in classrooms or meeting rooms and were easier to manage, but other places in which the focus groups and questionnaires were undertaken included changing rooms, the club canteen, the physiotherapist's room, and in two clubs, the boardroom. In particular, when the focus groups were conducted in places like changing rooms, the physiotherapist's room, and the club boardroom it became increasingly apparent that the players were suspicious of 'who was about' and it took time to build their confidence so that they felt able to talk openly with me. There were a number of occasions where players would check who (if anyone) was stood outside the room before they replied to a question I asked. Others would cut short their answers as a coach walked past the door or would have a brief look around before the focus group had even started, such was their suspicion and concern about the possible reactions their comments would get from coaches and EWOs.

Notwithstanding my fears about whether the players might not wish to express their opinions about education, welfare and their wider lives, many players actually appeared to value the opportunity to talk openly about their experiences. Indeed, it became clear as the study progressed that the research was the first opportunity many of them had been given to talk as openly as possible about their grievances, frustrations, and their worries without the fear of a coach or other member of staff using the information 'against them'. It was thus not unusual

for the focus groups to conclude with the players thanking myself and the Lead Supervisor for our interest in their *real* lives, rather than being simply preoccupied with their performances on the field. In two cases, the players applauded when the focus group was over, such was their enjoyment of being able to ‘get things off their chest’!

In view of the aforementioned encounters (and many others) it is incumbent upon me to reflect upon the difficulty I had between striking a balance between developing empathy with the players and remaining sufficiently detached in order to conduct the research in an appropriate way. What I had not envisaged prior to the research was the number of negative stories that would emerge during the course of my discussions with them. Whilst I had understood that, in all probability, the world I was about to research was going to be very different from the one I had imagined and had read about, I was, nevertheless, still unsure of what that world would be like and what the experiences of those who work in that occupation would be. As the research progressed, however, it became increasingly difficult to conceal or, at best, limit the extent to which I developed empathetic understanding with the players and the situations in which they found themselves. The extent of my emotional involvement with players was not an altogether ‘bad’ thing that impacted negatively on the research. Indeed, it allowed me to convey to them that I was sympathetic to their circumstances and, particularly in the later stages of the research, I was able to explain that players at other clubs had expressed a similar view or recalled similar experiences and this proved to be a useful tactic when exploring particularly sensitive issues. As my empathy towards the players grew, so did my involvement in what they were saying and it became increasingly difficult to critically analyze what they were saying rather than simply agreeing with their predicaments. In this regard, having another researcher present who was able to ask a limited number of questions where appropriate proved to be very valuable, especially because it enabled me to

refer to my schedule of questions and gather my thoughts before questioning the players again. It would be wrong and misleading if I was to suggest that the stories relayed by the players did not impact upon me personally and the research in any way. As will be made clear in later chapters, many of the accounts players offered were worrying when one considers that they were 16-18-year-old males who had only just left full-time compulsory education and were now working within an adult-dominated environment. These, and other, moments during the course of conducting my research were indeed ones that took my breath away and proved to be amongst the most interesting, if at times disturbing, research stories and lessons that I would never have had the privilege of re-telling here had I not had the opportunity to undertake my research in the way I did.

## **Summary**

The central objective of this chapter has been to justify, sociologically, the selection of self-completion questionnaires and focus groups as two research methods that could generate relevant data that would help to answer the research questions of this thesis. In doing so, it was argued that these methods together held out the possibility of adequately examining the complex interdependencies that exist between the various aspects of players' working lives. The chapter also outlined the procedures undertaken to complete the research and identified how the data generated were analysed. These data are presented in the next three chapters of this thesis, beginning in Chapter Four, which reports on players' interpretations and experiences of some key aspects of the culture of professional football that provide an important backdrop to the accounts players provided in relation to their experiences of the educational component of the ASE programme (Chapter Five), and other welfare-related issues (Chapter Six).

## Chapter Four

### **The Culture of Professional Football**

#### **Introduction**

The objective of this chapter is to examine the day-to-day lives of players in the study by focusing, in particular, on the sacrifices they have to make in their professional and personal lives in order to maximize their chances of becoming a professional footballer. Based on data generated in the focus groups, the chapter explores some key aspects of the figurations players comprise with others inside and outside of their respective clubs to illustrate the relational constraints to which these young players were subject. In this regard, the findings indicate the considerable importance players placed upon demonstrating a ‘good attitude’ to coaches and management, which was discussed by the majority of players as a crucial dimension of the culture of professional football that they must convey to others should they wish to gain a professional contract at the end of their scholarship. The chapter will also consider how discipline, accepting without question coaches’ views and criticism, not being viewed as ‘big time’, and the central importance of ‘making sacrifices’ away from the club, were also critical dimensions of the sub-cultures characteristic of the game that came to enable, and constrain, the ways in which players thought, and acted, in relation to their personal situations.

#### **The importance of a ‘good attitude’ and not acting ‘big time’**

As Roderick (2006) has noted, the possession of ‘a good attitude’ is often seen as one of, if not the, most important attribute a player must convey to significant others (especially the

coaches and manager) to become a professional player. In this study, part of this 'good attitude' required the players to maintain an appreciation of 'self' (Blumer, 1969) and observe their relatively low status as players by upholding the 'social rules' (Goffman, 1961) that define their interaction with others. If players transgressed these rules, managers and coaches sought to 'ground' players by using stigmatizing labels such as 'big time', which were often deployed within groups and were designed to lead players to question whether they had the 'right attitude'. In this regard, while Parker (1996) was correct to observe that many players seek to chase the 'big time', that is, to secure a professional contract at the end of their scholarship, the players in this study were simultaneously constrained from outwardly expressing a desire to do so to those most central to their interdependencies: coaches and managers. Accordingly, the players appeared caught in a double bind (Elias, 1978); that is to say, whilst they harboured an inner desire to acquire the status of being a professional footballer, they were nevertheless constantly reminded, if not stigmatized and discredited (Goffman, 1963), by significant others if they acted in ways which suggested that they had already 'made it' and were too self-absorbed individually (Elias, 2001). For example, those who occupied relatively powerful positions, such as managers and coaches, sought to keep players grounded by reminding them that they were 'only' a scholar or apprentice. Other members of the players' figurations, particularly their teammates and first team players, also engaged in the verbal stigmatization of those who were interpreted as acting 'big time'. Many of the players, therefore, argued that being seen as 'big time' by members of their figuration during their everyday encounters was something to be avoided for they ran the risk of being discredited (Roderick, 2006). This was because being 'big time' meant that individual players were perceived to be putting their own interests ahead of others in a manner that is believed to indicate their arrogance:

- 3. Say like someone who thinks they are good, knows they're good and they won't like
- 6. [Interrupts] Work for the team
- 1. [Interrupts] Just arrogant basically.
- 2. They think they are better than the group that they are in so like
- 3. [Interrupts] Don't bother working as hard as they can.
- Q. And being that way undermines your chances of getting a pro in your opinion?
- 6. Like the coaches explain
- 1. [Interrupts] They will recognize it.
- 6. Because there are people at our club who are big time.
- 4. Or as soon as they get the pro it normally changes people. I think that's when they normally start to get 'big time' ...
- 6. I think the ones who are 'big time' are probably the ones who have already got pros. They think that they have made it if they've got a pro so they don't want to work because they think 'I am better than this'.
- 1. Or try and improve because they think how they are at the moment is good enough instead of like not having a pro, knowing they have got to work hard to improve and being a better player overall.
- (Year 2, Club 20)

Another group of players expressed a similar view when they were asked to describe what constituted being 'big time':

- 2. Just think you're the man.
- 1. Think you've made it and that.
- 5. Think you're better than what you are.
- Q. You can't be seen to be 'big time'? Why is that?
- 4. Because we've not done there yet.
- 1. You're not there yet, yeah.
- (Year 1, Club 18)

In this regard, whilst players often viewed professionals in largely negative terms because they were 'big time', they simultaneously felt that professionals had 'earned the right' to act in this way. It was assumed that by gaining a full-time contract professional players had already demonstrated they had a 'good attitude' and, therefore, one of their rewards was to be able to act with an element of arrogance in which their I-identity (Elias, 2001), rather than the collective we-identity, which they were expected to convey was prioritized. These



perceptions were articulated in the comments of this group of players who were employed by a Championship club, and who said of professional players:

3. They'd complain if they had to carry their own goals, they really would.
  1. Thinking you have already made it.
  5. Saying like, 'No. We are not doing that job'.
  2. They have made it, they have already done their jobs.
  3. I respect them though because they've med it.
- (Year 1, Club 13)

Whilst acting 'big time' in front of their peers would result in a player being jeered by teammates for their perceived arrogance and being highly individualized (Elias, 2001), the prevailing view was that being seen by coaches or management as 'big time' was a far more serious matter, for it gave the impression that the *status* of being a footballer was more important than their desire to win for the team. Acting 'big time' was, therefore, something to be avoided, for it led significant others to question their attitudes and appetite for the game, and threatened their preferred self-images (Goffman, 1961) as players. In some cases, as in the following example taken from a focus group held with Championship players, coaches and managers used the phrase 'big time' as a means of controlling the behaviour of players who were accordingly expected to modify aspects of their behaviour, such as their body language:

7. If you are not trying hard enough or something.
  2. Body language and stuff.
  1. He starts calling you big time and that.
  7. Yeah, he says you are big time.
- (Year 2, Club 7)

Another group of players, this time from the PL, similarly explained how their coach sought to identify players who were perceived as being ‘big time’ to humiliate them and question their credibility in front of others. In this instance, the coach cited the failure of players to have obtained a professional contract, despite representing their country, as evidence of the need for players to remain grounded:

3. Because you hear this all the time ‘big time this’, ‘big time that’. Do you know what I mean? If you get someone our age who goes in the first team, or does this, and you come back, like ‘[name] what did you say about if you go away with England and that?’

1. Yeah, I come back from England duty ... and say I have a bad session or something, then he would be like: ‘Oh I see you’ve been away with England, you think you’ve made it blah, blah, blah’.

3. Do you know what I mean? You can’t help that, do you know what I mean? If you give a ball away, ‘Oh that’s what England teach you’ and all this shit.

1. Yeah, yeah, like if I do a certain run. Like say some left-backs got it and I come inside, he’ll be like ‘Why, is that what you do at England? Well we don’t do that here’. But he’ll make me think like it’s a bad thing if I get called up for England.

(Year 2, Club 5)

In order to alleviate the possibility of being seen as ‘big time’, the players were constrained to focus on conveying a good attitude to their coaches during each encounter with them. It was not surprising, therefore, that the players in this study felt that the culture of professional football often meant that ‘playing well’ in training and matches came second to having ‘the right attitude’ when coaches and managers were considering which players to award a professional contract. For example, when asked what they thought the management were looking for from them in order to be given a professional contract, one group of players from a League Two club said that:

1. They tell us time and time again.

4. Attitude is the main thing like, it is even bigger than football.

3. Only at clubs like this.
  4. Because people say like, if you have got a bad attitude then you are never going to get anywhere.
  2. Well you won't.
- (Year 2, Club 2)

Similarly, the following group of players from a Championship club were asked what coaches and managers were looking for in order to offer the players a professional contract and also highlighted the centrality of possessing a 'good attitude' thus:

3. Well obviously you've got to be a good player, but you've got to have the right attitude as well.
  4. If they tell you that you need to focus on something I think they want to see that you are working to improve it.
- Q. What do you think a good attitude is for a footballer?
5. I think like if they tell you to do something just like don't question them, just go and do it.
  3. You can't be like causing trouble like on the streets or up town, you got to realise that you're playing for [club name] and er, like respect. Because at the end of the day, if you do something bad, it'll get back to the club.
- (Year 1, Club 19)

In order to convey the appropriate 'self' and impression that they had 'the right attitude' however, the players claimed that first and foremost they were continually required to work hard on and off the field – that is, when 'front stage' (Goffman, 1959) – at every available opportunity. When asked what managers and coaches were looking for from players, one group of players from a PL Club said:

7. Professionalism.
  1. Good attitude.
  2. Respect.
- Q. What's a good attitude?
6. Hard-working, willing to do.

1. Hard-working, listen to what they say.  
(Year 1, Club 5)

The culture of 'working hard' in training and matches was typically related to players' performances where they were routinely expected to demonstrate their ability to work hard and earn the respect of coaches and managers in the process. As Roderick (2006, p. 36) has noted, 'working hard' in a professional football environment, like those experienced by the players in this study, 'can be interpreted to mean someone who is competitive and who is constantly looking to improve their level of performance' on the pitch. It is important to note, however, that any improvement in performance does not tend to have at its core the more technical elements of the game but, rather, it is the more physical attributes of players' performances that are frequently the subject of the coaches' and managers' opinions. Indeed, there was a near universal acceptance among players that working hard was not necessarily about spending extra hours on the training pitch. Working at high levels of intensity, for as long as possible, during training or matches was instead received as being particularly critical. The importance of outwardly expressing a 'work ethic' to significant others as a means of bolstering the perception that they possessed a good attitude was illustrated by one group of players from a League Two club:

- Q. What constitutes working hard?
2. Like in training and on the pitch.
  8. Yeah, like work rate.
  7. It is about being consistent as well.
  8. He [the coach] always says, 'When you come off at half time you should be like puffing and panting and tired and if you are not then you are not working hard enough'.
  6. 'Be aggressive', he says.
- (Year 1, Club 1)

The following extract taken from a focus group with second year players at the same club emphasizes the point that, for any player to be seen to be working hard, it was vital that they

were viewed as someone who could be relied upon to not let their team mates down by not running hard enough, by not tackling hard enough, or by failing to listen to instructions:

Q. What is working hard?

3. Running around.

8. Doing what everyone tells you.

4. Just doing the right things, make sure your attitude's right.

3. Yeah, get your head down.

Q. What is the right attitude?

3. Just get your head down and work for the team.

8. Work hard for each other; don't let yourself down, don't let the side down.

4. Wanting to work.

(Year 2, Club 1)

The belief that working hard helps players to begin earning respect from their coaches was perhaps most clearly expressed in the various ways coaches reacted to their performances following a match. In the following extract, for example, players from a club in the Championship were asked to describe the way the coach addresses them if they lose. Their response, which was typical of other players' responses in the study, made reference to the use of the use of derogatory language in order to humiliate and isolate players and how this approach was underpinned by a belief that players had not tried hard enough:

Q. What kinds of things do they say to you?

5. 'Shit bags'.

2. We get 'shit bags' a lot.

1. Or 'shit house'.

Q. What else do they focus on?

3. Like tearing you apart.

5. Yeah.

7. Total humiliation ...

1. Sometimes he [coach] singles you out.

6. Sometimes it can be like character building or, you know, what I mean, dealing wi' abuse ...

7. It's not if you lose, it's the fact on how you play, so if you play shit and don't show any determination, or desire to wanna play for the team, you just get fucked.

(Year 2, Club 7)

On the contrary, if players had lost a match but had, in the eyes of the coach, tried as hard as they could in the game, many players agreed that they would then receive a rather different approach from their manager. The different approaches adopted by many of the coaches are illustrated by the response of this group of players from a League Two club who were asked how the coach reacted when they lost:

- 4. If we've played bad then he'll have words, but if we've worked hard
- 7. [Interrupts] If you've worked hard and the team has not won he'll say 'Look hard luck' and 'You've worked hard'.
- 8. As long as you give 100%.
- 7. If you don't try and you've just let them win, he'll go absolutely mad.
- Q. What does he do?
- 2. Just shouts.
- 3. Throwing stuff, kicking boots.
- 2. Kicking bottles.
- (Year 2, Club 1)

As significant, and generally very powerful, members of players' figurations managers and coaches not only play a central role in defining what constitutes a good attitude (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006), but they also impress upon players kinds of 'emotional scripts' they are expected to enact to maximize the likelihood that they will be awarded a professional contract, and this did not mean taking on characteristics of someone who was 'big time'. It was also the case that, as other studies have shown (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2012; Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Parker, 1996), managers and coaches employ an 'openly explicit managerial tactic comprised [of] a mixture of violent and abusive language, direct personal castigation, scornful humour, and traditional all-male "banter"' (Parker, 1996, p. 73) in order to socialize players into these sub-cultural expectations. Indeed, illustrating the endemic nature of swearing as a form of control, the players in this study noted, in a similar manner to those in Parker's (1996) work, that managers and coaches tried to keep them grounded while

expecting them to convey a certain level of commitment demonstrated by how much willingness you are able to show. As one player (Gary) in Parker's (1996, p. 76-7) study put it:

As soon as you get here, like at our age now, after two weeks you've run your bollocks off, you get slaughtered all the time, like off people trying to make you feel that big [indicates inferior stature] – you've got to show them what you're made of and all that.

Similarly, if the club management believed that the standards that have been established are not met, they will often question the commitment of the players involved claiming that they somehow 'don't want it enough' (Roderick, 2006).

### **The nature and purpose of menial jobs**

As the previous section indicates, by working hard in training and during matches players frequently endeavoured to meet the expectations their coaches had of them in the hope that this would increase the likelihood of them being offered a professional contract at the end of their two-year scholarship or apprenticeship. Despite the emphasis that was placed upon the way players behave on the pitch, they were also expected to convey a similarly good attitude during the time they spent away from training and playing. This was particularly apparent in the mandatory jobs that players were expected to complete each day, which principally included cleaning boots for the professional players, managing equipment, pumping balls up for them, cleaning changing rooms and the mini-bus, and undertaking various tasks on match days. The following extract from a focus group conducted at a League Two club was

indicative of the comments of all players who played outside the PL and who commented on the various roles that they were expected to perform:

1. That is the shittest bit, when you just have to clean boots, Hoover floors, carry boxes 'cos the kit man doesn't want to do it himself. Just stuff like that.
  4. Keep the place tidy really. Like it is someone's job to do this room; it is his job to do the gym.
  5. Like the home team dressing room, clean up after the first team, pick up flip-flops, slippers.
  3. They can't even put their own gear in the bins, we have to do it all for them.
  5. You will find on a match day you have like four apprentices who come in ... and do jobs and whatever the gaffer wants us to do.
- (Year 2, Club 2)

In a not dissimilar way, players at a League One club also explained that cleaning changing rooms and providing equipment for the first team were the tasks they were expected to undertake daily as part of their scholarship:

5. Changing rooms you have to clean up, this [one] and the home [one].
  6. Not a lot, like sweeping up in here, and then on match days.
  3. If the first team use our equipment we have to clean them up.
  6. Match day we have to as well.
  4. Take equipment to the training ground, set it all up for the first team, and take it down.
- Q. Why do you have to do those jobs?
6. It's part of the apprenticeship. It's like, earlier on, I was saying about cleaning boots ... [getting] the respect between the pros.
- (Year 2, Club 3)

In addition to these jobs, there were a number of tasks that were unique to individual clubs, which included the following example from a League Two club, where players claimed that they were regularly expected to fetch and carry post for officials within the club:



- 2. We didn't think like this bad did we?
  - 6. Basically, we run the club.
  - 4. You have to run and post the mail, stuff like that.
  - Q. You have to do what?
  - 4. You have to post their mail.
  - Q. Who's mail, the clubs?
  - All. Yeah.
  - 4. There is a post box just round there so you have to run or walk round there and post it and come back.
  - 2. They just give it you and you and say 'go do it' and you can't say no obviously.
- (Year 2, Club 12)

Another example of the exceptional jobs that players were expected to undertake is evident in following excerpt taken from a conversation where players from a League Two club were recalling an occasion when they were ordered to clear snow from the pitch at the stadium during the previous winter:

- 2. We cleared that little square end of the pitch just in the corner.
  - 5. When it snowed.
  - 2. They put the covers on the pitch 'cos it was gonna be cold, but then it snowed over night and it was about 3 or 4 inches deep, maybe even more than that, and all over the pitch, and they had a game in the next couple of days. So we had to clear the pitch, and instead of getting a tractor in or something to sweep it off, they thought 'Oh, we'll just try and do it with shovels to start with'.
  - 1. There's only about four shovels.
  - 5. Four shovels, two wheelbarrows.
  - 6. Four hours, we didn't even do half of the half pitch.
  - 2. We did about to the 18 yard box.
  - Q. Did they ring you to call you in, or was it a normal weekday?
  - 5. No, we came up expecting to train and they told us ...
  - 1. Yeah, we didn't train all day we just did shovelling snow.
  - 5. When the first team finished, the first team gaffer came out and turned it into a training session.
  - 1. Said we should run with the wheelbarrows.
- (Year 2, Club 21)

Although players from PL clubs in the study were not expected to clean the boots of professional players, they did undertake a series of other domestic tasks on a day-to-day

basis. At one club, for example, players claimed that they were expected to maintain the cleanliness of changing rooms and boot rooms:

- 2. Our boot room, make sure it's tidy and clean and that.
  - 1. Our changing room, make sure the showers are swept up and that.
  - 4. Pro's boot room as well.
  - 1. Balls make sure they're pumped up as well.
  - Q. For everyone?
  - 3. Nah, just for the 18s. Just for the 18s, not for the first team.
  - 4. And then first team jobs on a match day as well, home games we've got to tidy their dressing up and shit.
- (Year 2, Club 18)

Despite the view that players are no longer required to perform such tasks (e.g. Wallace, 2010), all players in this study were required, to varying degrees, to undertake some form of duty as part of their scholarship, whether that be for the first team, or for themselves. It was clear from the players' comments that the kinds of jobs they were expected to do, and for whom, was dependent upon the division in which the football club for whom they played were based, with players at PL clubs appearing to do different kinds of, and in some cases, fewer, jobs for professional players than those from other clubs. In all clubs, however, jobs were used as a form of symbolizing the comparatively lower status of young players who were embarking upon their scholarship alongside professional players. In some clubs, the use of players to complete a range of duties represented a fairly cheap form of labour for clubs who were not required to employ other members of staff, such as cleaners (Monk, 2000; Monk & Olsson, 2006). In other clubs, the expectation that young players performed various jobs appeared to be related to the ways in which coaches, management and, to some extent, professional players, sought to undermine players' positions in clubs by reinforcing to them that they had 'not yet made it'. One strategy that the coaching staff at one PL club adopted in this respect was the insistence that young players wore different coloured kit to professional

players, which served as a symbol of their status and which they described as being synonymous with being ‘in prison’:

- 2. It’s just like with the kit colour ...
  - 8. Like you know in prison ...
  - 8. I was thinking about this the other day, ‘Why are we in the red kit, and they’re in the black?’
  - 2. So that division is there.
  - 8. But in prison some people wear different colours.
  - 1. Like between white and blacks?
  - All. Laugh
  - 8. No. Some people wear one colour and other wear a different colour.
- (Year 1, Club 5)

Similarly, a group of second year players at the same club spoke of the purpose of wearing different coloured kit during their time at the Academy in the following way:

- 2. If I get called down for the reserves, or if I play or train with the first team, if you do something wrong they will moan at you. Or if it’s something to do with you they will just get on your back, like always on your back because you are in red kit, but if you were a pro they wouldn’t say nothing.
  - Q. Why do they treat you differently?
  - 1. They don’t give you no respect really, when you’re in red kit.
  - Q. Who don’t, the coaches?
  - 2. Everyone, like players, coaches, anyone ...
  - 1. They probably had it when they were first, like our age going down training so they like give it to us. That’s the only reason I can think of.
- (Year 2, Club 5)

Other groups of players described how their clubs used other strategies to differentiate them from professional players. For example, as the following extract indicates, some players at a League Two club were required to collect the balls used by professional players following training and wait for the professionals to eat before they could have their lunch:

1. If they [professional players] lose a ball in the bushes we have to search for them.
  4. Yeah, we have to go climbing in the bushes.
  2. We have a good training session in between those times ...
  5. Then we come back on the mini-bus, un-pack the stuff, go up get some lunch ...
  1. After the first team have ate what they want.
  3. Yeah, we got what is left.
  5. We get the left-overs. Then, come back down, if we have a double [training session] we go in the gym for an hour, an hour and three quarters, and then do jobs again.
  3. Then do more jobs.
- (Year 2, Club 2)

Similar experiences were recounted by players at another club, who explained that they were also expected to tidy up after professionals at the club once their own obligations had been completed:

6. They used to like leave the cones out after the game, and they train at the opposite end of the fields to us
  5. [Interrupts] Smash the balls round and like.
  6. Yeah, if they shot and the ball went in the bush they'd just leave it and walk off, but there'd be balls everywhere and they'd just go straight away and then we've got to collect our stuff and then go to the firsts as well and search for balls ...
  3. And if you see the training ground it's just full of bushes and trees and if the ball goes in there then it's a job to find them and we're just up there for an hour just looking for the ball.
  2. And they used like our players last year, didn't they? Just to collect balls while we were training. So instead of training a couple of us had to go and collect balls.
- (Year 2, Club 3)

In this regard, it was clear that because players occupied relatively low positions of power within the interdependent networks (Elias, 1978) that characterized their clubs, they were socialized into accepting the fact that they should accept without question the jobs they were expected to undertake. More specifically, the players had come to internalize the view that doing jobs was justifiable by the sub-cultural expectations that they would 'keep their feet on the ground', learn to respect those who have been awarded professional contracts, and gain a

greater appreciation of the kinds of lifestyles believed to be on offer to them should they gain a professional contract. Commenting on the importance of respecting professional players and the alleged ‘benefits’ experienced by them, one group of players from a League Two club said:

1. We’re like seen as the people that should respect the first team and we should be the ones that do the stuff for them.
5. Especially when we should be in the first team.
2. We’ll appreciate first team life more once we’ve done it ’cos they don’t do nowhere near as much as what we do. So after we’ve done it and then if we get a pro or not, we’ll get the benefits of like going home early, only doing one session a day and that. We won’t have to hang round to do jobs and that. That’s why we aspire to be a pro. (Year 2, Club 21)

Players at a Championship club also commented that, as youth players, they were expected to appreciate the ‘privileges’ of being a professional by adhering to appropriate standards of discipline, which they perceived as ‘school-like’:

3. It’s only like school though innit?
  2. Yeah, discipline ...
  3. It is like the discipline and rules. It’s not like school, we all have a laugh and that.
  2. It is more like a privilege when you become pro. When you are not you’ve got to do this and that, but when you become pro you can do what you want so it is like something to look forward to ...
  3. We have to respect them so they have them rules don’t they? It is just discipline innit?
- (Year 1, Club 13)

The jobs that players undertook served to emphasize the rather unequal power differentials (Elias, 1978; Murphy *et al.*, 2000) between young and professional players, but also provided the former with an additional avenue through which they could exhibit a ‘good attitude’ to coaches and management. By embarking upon their jobs in a positive manner, and

completing them to the required standard, the players hoped they would be trusted to approach a match in the same way. Conversely, if the players failed to complete their jobs satisfactorily, this was interpreted as a significant threat to their chances of securing a professional contract because they could not be trusted:

Q. So if you didn't do your jobs that would affect your chances of getting a pro?

3. Yeah.

1 'Cos then it would give you a bad reputation ... people would say

2. [Interrupts] People would think they wouldn't be able to trust you.

1. They wouldn't be able to, they wouldn't respect you either if you can't carry out a simple task, then how are you going to be able to help each other out on the football field?

(Year 2, Club 21)

Other players, as in the following example, taken from a League One club suggested that if they were perceived by coaches as avoiding their responsibilities off the pitch, then this was believed to indicate something about their poor attitude on the pitch:

1. Like if you are lazy off the pitch, if you don't do a job properly they say 'Oh, lazy off the pitch, lazy on the pitch', like making out you wouldn't work hard on the pitch. But I don't think that is right, I think that is totally different.

6. No, that's not right, it's different.

2. 'Cos there's fucking doing a job and then there's playing football ...

3. Obviously they want us to work hard, but they like revolve around doing jobs as well ... If you are lazy, they think you are gonna be lazy on the pitch but that's totally wrong I think.

(Year 2, Club 10)

These data indicate how players are expected to continually engage in complex and uncertain processes of impression management (Goffman, 1959), not least because what constitutes a 'good attitude' is wide ranging and often determined by the peculiarities of coaches and managers (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006). More specifically, what comprises the 'right

attitude' for coaches and managers is often grounded in their own habitus (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2012) and experiences of, and ideologies about, the game and not a specifically defined set of measurable standards. Despite the ambiguity that surrounds the key elements of a 'good attitude', it is clear that all players are continually expected to cope with the uncertainties and problems their interdependence (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom, 1977) with club management has for them. Indeed, since they are dependent on club management for many social needs (primarily the awarding of a professional contract) players were particularly constrained to meet the obligations of their superiors (Elias, 1978; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998).

### **Discipline as a form of social control**

Once enrolled on a full-time basis within their Academy or CoE, players began to be socialized into the way of life as a footballer, which frequently involved them accepting that professional football 'is an aggressive, tough, masculine and at times violent "industry"' (Kelly & Waddington, 2006, p. 151). One of the ways in which this was expressed most explicitly was in their relationships with the coach or manager and, in particular, in the techniques used by the management team to control players' behaviour, performance, and attitude. Indeed, when asked to recount the experiences they had with their first manager, a recurring theme of the comments of scholars was a 'fear of the manager, and the manager's use of verbal and physical abuse to intimidate young players and induce fear' (Kelly & Waddington, 2006, p. 151). Unlike in Kelly and Waddington's study, however, none of the players in this study made reference to any coach-on-player, or manager-on-player, physical violence that was used as part of the controlling techniques employed by their manager or coach. It seems reasonable to conclude from these findings that the prevalence of physical violence in the Academy or CoE system may be relatively low compared to the levels seen in

the professional form of the game as described by Kelly and Waddington (2006), but that other forms of physical punishment were by comparison considerably more common.

Indeed, rather than engaging in physical violence to gain greater control over players, the managers and coaches of players in this study were said to have regularly used physical exercise as a form of punishment. In the majority of cases, this resulted in players being asked to run, or sprint, for a designated period of time or distance. One group of players from a PL club, for example, discussed the ways in which losing matches often meant they were expected to undertake additional days (often on a Sunday), which in the majority of cases, included running:

- 2. Everything's based on results. I know that's stupid 'cos that's what you're trying to [do], but if we lose one week it's down, if we win, like it's happy.
- 3. We go bowling.
- 2. Yeah, we won, we're going bowling like.
- 5. Last week we were running on Sunday ... Straight into running, no warm-up, straight into a sprint.
- Q. Why?
- 4. We lost.
- 3. Old school basically.
- 5. Yeah.
- 3. Basically, you lose, you're running on a Sunday.
- 5. You lose, you run.
- 4. And then we ran on Monday and Tuesday.
- (Year 2, Club 9)

The use of physical punishments, in the form of running, was a recurring theme across the focus groups. In the following example taken from a focus group held at a PL club, players recalled the reaction of their coach to a recent defeat and poor performance:



- 4. It would be a hard Tuesday morning.
  - 1. Oh!
  - 5. It would be a hard week the next week.
  - Q. What would they do typically?
  - 4. Get you running.
  - 1. Run.
  - 4. It wouldn't be anything different just like.
  - 1. [Interrupts] More running.
  - 4. Everyone would be down and that and the atmosphere wouldn't be as lively.
- (Year 1, Club 18)

Another group of players at a Championship club claimed that they were often made by their manager to walk as slowly as possible around the perimeter of the training complex as punishment for not completing their jobs satisfactorily. The players said:

- 8. You get to walk round the pitch in'nit?
  - 7. Oh yeah ... we never changed the water thing once, so we just had to walk round. We couldn't do it fast, we had to walk slowly.
  - 3. Walk round the training ground.
  - 6. Right next to the bushes.
  - Q. What is the point of that?
  - 1. To teach you to do your job.
  - 4. It teaches you.
  - 7. Responsibility.
  - 2. Even though he was just in a bad mood but ...
  - 4. [Interrupts] He just makes them look an idiot in front of everyone.
- (Year 2, Club 8)

Players from a League Two club similarly explained that they were made to repeatedly engage in a series of physically demanding exercises including attempting tuck-jumps from crash mats designed to tire players. When asked what the 'crash mat' included, the players said:

4. It is this massive crash mat that is about this big [gestures] and you have to do like knees-to-chest.

5. As soon as you step onto it you like sink and you've got to like jump up and touch the ceiling, land on your back but you are like sinking in so it's horrible to get up.

4. You think that you are jumping, you think that you are getting all that high but really you are not.

Q. Why do you do that?

All. Punishment.

2. No-one likes it.

3. And it kills you.

(Year 1, Club 12)

Physical punishments of these kinds were the most common form of punishment handed out by coaches and managers to all players at all clubs in the study, usually in response to poor performances and ill-discipline. Without exception, these punishments were imposed on Sundays, which was the only day of the week where players, unless injured, were given a day off. This was typically perceived as being an unfair and an unrealistic form of punishment by players, who often felt that there were hidden agendas behind the decisions the coaches and managers took in this respect:

Q. When do you have to come in on a Sunday?

3. It's like if someone has done something wrong, like been punished for something, or say if we've had the match on the Saturday and we've played like horrific, like the worst.

6. We come in on Sundays because most of the time there is a workforce needed on a Sunday

2. [Interrupts] Yeah, yeah, that is true.

6. And they will find anything, they will find like a reason for us to be in that day ...

4. We have to do these analysis sheets ... which you have to completely fill out about how you've played, and how the team played, and ... quite a few of us didn't do that. So on the Monday like...we all had to run up the stairs on the stadium as like a punishment for not doing it, and then a couple of weeks later ... [the manager] said we have to come in on a Sunday because of that, even though we've already ran for it.

(Year 1, Club 21)

The tendency for coaches to remove players' so-called 'privileges' of having a day off, which they often used to go home and see parents and friends, was also apparent in the PL. One group of players from a PL club spoke of the requirement to attend training on a Sunday when they had lost, or played poorly on a Saturday, to discuss their performance:

1. Depends if we played well and if we win. If we played well and lose, yeah, he [coach] doesn't really get angry. But if we lose and we don't play
  5. [Interrupts] Like on Saturday, he doesn't say anything, he just said
  2. [Interrupts] Be in on Sunday.
  5. Come in Sunday 12 o'clock.
  3. And then he went home then, he went right home ... It's just 'cos we got beat so solidly.
  1. He said he won't do it again.
  6. It's 'cos we should have won, that's why.
  - Q. So what did you do on Sunday when you had to come in?
  2. Had a meeting.
  5. Just had a meeting.
  3. Just talked about we're gonna have to start winning and that.
- (Year 1, Club 11)

Within the context of professional football Academies and CoE, all players tended to accept physical punishments, even though they did not agree with them, because of the relational constraints to which they were subject within their figurations in which the balance of power was very heavily tilted in favour of the managers and coaches. By being constrained to avoid speaking out or acting against the authority of the management, the players were socialized into accepting that if they contravened the accepted standards of their coaches the consequences would be likely to involve physical forms of punishment, including training on Sunday and some form of running, which formed part of the traditional and authoritarian forms of managerial control and discipline that beset the game (Kelly & Waddington, 2006).

### **Discipline as a form of social control: verbal punishments**

As well as imposing physical punishments upon their players, coaches also attempted to induce fear and discipline in them by using verbal forms of abuse, which often comprised swearing, shouting, insults and personal criticism. These forms of verbal comments were typically referred to as ‘bollockings’ and characterized those situations in which players were being told-off for their perceived poor behaviour, attitude, or performance. The following extract, taken from a focus group with players in the Championship, illustrates how these ‘bollockings’ tended to follow defeats that were characterized by poor attitude, commitment and performance:

Q. Do you get bollockings a lot?

3. Yeah, I say we do.

4. When we deserve them I think, yeah.

3. Yeah, when we deserve them then we get them.

Q. When do you deserve them?

1. When we play bad.

3. Well, when we’ve played badly in a game. Like say we lose 3-0 and have a bad performance then we do have a bit of a bollocking at the end.

Q. Are you talking about this weekend specifically?

3. Well say we lose 2-1 but we play well, he’s fine with that. But say we lose, I don’t know, 3-0 and it’s a bad performance, then that’s when he gets annoyed and he gives us a bit of a row then.

(Year 1, Club 19)

Any ‘bollockings’ the scholars received tended to be vocal in kind, though there were instances where the threat of physical violence by coaches was used to convey the magnitude of the coaches’ anger by inciting fear among players that real forms of physical violence could be used unless their performances or behaviour improved. These issues were neatly captured by a group of players at a League Two club, who reflected upon the ways in which their coach reacted to a defeat:

1. Oh my God!
  - All: Gasp
  3. Good luck still having a door on the hinges ...
  1. He would kick the shit out of the door.
  3. Oh, Morecombe, the door actually came off, he actually booted it in.
  1. He smashed the door in.
  4. When he kicked them bottles!
- (Year 2, Club 2)

When asked about the reaction of a coach if performances did not meet his standards, the following group of players from a PL club commented upon the way the coach regularly kicked bottles and got ‘in their face’, which was a common strategy employed by some of the coaches at the clubs in this study who wanted to threaten players:

1. Ah, he does love kicking a bottle to be fair.
  2. On the side. He won’t be violent like but he will just raise his voice and he’ll
  1. [Interrupts] Swear a lot.
  2. Yeah, he will swear a lot
  1. [Interrupts] Get in your face.
  2. And say, that was embarrassing, blah, blah, blah, you’re taking the piss, sort it out basically.
- (Year 2, Club 20)

As in the example above, in all cases where the coach or manager handed out ‘bollockings’ players were routinely subject to the persistence of swearing, particularly in the context of a match or training. The normalized use of this kind of occupational language of professional football, which frequently characterized encounters between players, coaches, and managers, was evident in the comments of players at another PL club:

- Q. Do they ever swear at you when they’re having a go at you?
- All. Yeah.
2. Fucking hell, every time they have a go at you.

- Q. What kinds of things would they say to you?
3. Fucking shit.
  5. Yeah.
  1. [The Coach] called me a 'Fucking Muppet' today like.
  7. Muppet. Fucking Muppet.
  4. Cheeky cunt.
- Q. Why do they do that?'
5. It's just football isn't it? That's the way it goes.
  3. It's aggression, it brings it out of you dun' it?
- (Year 2, Club 11)

In other instances, players claimed that swearing was commonly used when coaches directed criticism towards them, often in relation to the way they trained or played. In these scenarios, players claimed that reacting in the 'right way' and accepting insults was essential, for this helped demonstrate how they possessed the correct temperament or 'attitude' for professional football:

3. You get, er, raped by other teammates ... obviously the second years are under pressure and stuff, they like put you under pressure as well. Even the coaches like, when you get advice from them or something, then you've got to take it the right way, you've got to get used to it.
- Q. What kinds of things do they say?
1. Basically, if you make a mistake, they'll be like 'Come on, you can do better' or sometimes they'll even say insults and that but you have to be strong enough.
  2. Like we're the team, but it varies ... Some players are good at giving advice but others are worse, whereas some people moan at you, take personal issues, like maybe if you're overweight they just bring that into consideration.
- (Year 1, Club 21)

Another group of PL players felt that their coach often deliberately treated them, as if in a bad mood, in what resembled almost a test of their attitude:

2. You can't be loud; he doesn't like people laughing and joking.
- Q. Why not?
3. He thinks it's like you are big-headed basically.

2. Yeah. 'Cos he sees the way the first team ... are all like cocky and that, like laughing about. So he don't want us to go that way I think so he ... like teaches you discipline.

Q. How does he teach you discipline?

7. A lot of shouting.

2. He loves to know that he's the boss. Sometimes he tries to test us by coming in a bad mood to see how we react. Like he will come in and start picking on one person in the day, then he will see how people react. So if people are laughing and joking he is like 'You have seen I'm in a bad mood so why are you laughing?' He gives us that all the time.

(Year 2, Club 20)

In another scenario, players expressed the view that, no matter how they played, their performances were always criticized by coaches in front of other players. This was an approach employed by a number of coaches in order to cause greater humiliation, as in the following example taken from a focus group held at a PL club:

3. Say if you do something he'll just go 'That was shit'.

2. You'll have the game of your life, and like you'll have played well, but he'll still point out

3. [Interrupts] Something bad you've done.

2. 'Oh but you done this, just work on that'...

3. It's in front of everybody.

2. Yeah it is, he'll go round.

5. He'll go through the whole team and say 'You did this, you did that'.

7. He did it today. Everyone was standing there and he went though everyone.

3. Make an absolute show of someone ...

5. Once he went to me 'Listen bollocks' ... I thought 'Fuckin hell, that's a bit harsh innit?'

(Year 2, Club 11)

The treatment of players in this way was not unique to this club, for other players, including those lower down the leagues, also discussed how they were routinely criticized by coaches despite the impact this had on their self-confidence:

1. He will pick out the one point that you have done bad in the game. He will never say 'You have done well, you've done well this'
  4. [Interrupts] Like if you have a good game you will never get praise for it.
  1. He will always pick that one bad point, because you are not perfect you are going to have something wrong, he will always go to that. He'll not say 'Well done for that cross, well done for this'.
  - Q. And how do you feel?
  6. It just depends on the person. I don't mind him having a go at me because I know that it makes me think 'Shit, I have got to do better here'. But when he is picking on someone that you know it is just going to affect them
  2. [Interrupts] Kill them.
  6. You know that the second-half you are playing without them basically because you know his confidence is gone. You are playing with ten men really.
- (Year 2, Club 20)

The impact that criticism had on players' self-confidence was further emphasized by players at this PL club who described how they felt when they were criticized:

4. Fuckin' shit, you play worse.
  5. Yeah, it just makes you get worse and worse ...
  2. Yeah, it'll be on your mind if someone's like ... said something bad to you ...
  1. If you've played shit every day you'd get it every single day.
  3. No, even if you didn't play shit, like, you'll still get it probably once a week.
  1. There's not a training session you go through without him criticizing you.
- (Year 2, Club 11)

It is important to understand that the 'bollockings', swearing and criticism to which players were subject were seen as forming key aspects of the steep learning curve they were constrained to undertake whilst preparing for a career in professional football. Indeed, whilst labelled as 'banter', the mocking of other players and their performance was perceived as part of everyday life within professional football (Roderick, 2006), and players often rationalize this as a necessary part of their football education and socialization into the work place culture of football. It was essential, however, that players reacted to the criticism in the 'correct' way, particularly by working harder on the pitch, undertaking jobs that were not



previously scheduled, transmitting enthusiasm to others about the punishment being dealt and, perhaps most of all, not answering back to coaches or management staff. When asked about what would happen if they answered back in response to ‘bollockings’, swearing, or criticism from coaches, one group of PL players replied:

2. He’d probably just kick off big style then, send you in.

4. One thing you learn is you’re never right, never right. Doesn’t matter what happens, you’re never right.

Q. Why is that?

2. Because it’s linked to your attitude, because if you bite back you leave yourself nothing, digging a bigger hole for yourself.

4. You’re best just accepting and moving on.

1. Our coach has been there so he knows like, he’s got a lot of experience ...

3. With the banter as well, you couldn’t really do that in like a working job or something ’cos you’d probably get done for discriminating or something.

(Year 1, Club 18)

Other players agreed that by answering back to the coaches they were running the risk of being seen as disrespectful towards them and as not possessing the ‘right attitude’. More specifically, as Roderick (2006, p. 49; emphases in the original) has noted, ‘the act of not agreeing with advice would make them [players] appear to others as disrespectful, as though they were not prepared to listen and, also, that they did not really *want it* enough’. The ways in which players were often constrained not to respond at all when the coach was criticizing them for fear of being labelled as someone with a lack of respect was brought out particularly clearly by a group of players at a Championship club:

4. Yeah like on the weekend, in the game, I went to close down the player and the coach thought I should have stayed back on the halfway line so we had an argument about that.

Q. On the pitch?

4. Yeah ...

3. Well after the pitch he was saying like ‘You should never answer us back, we’ve been in the game longer than you and we know what’s right, we were only trying to help you’ and stuff like that.

Q. And how did that make you feel?

4. I know I should listen to them really because they have got a lot of experience. It’s just that like when you’re in the game it’s just hard for you to get frustrated. We were losing 3-0 as well, so I wasn’t very happy.

(Year 1, Club 19)

Reflecting upon what, in their experience, resulted from players’ answering back to a coach, another group of participants from a PL club said:

2. You get the smack down.

5. If you answer back, things just get worse and worse.

3. He’d be like ‘Who are you to talk down to me’.

2. No, sometimes you don’t even answer them back do ya? Sometimes you just speak to them like ‘Why are you answering back?’

5. ‘If you’re gonna speak to me like that then why can’t I answer you back?’ So I just do.

1. Say if you say something to ya and you say something back, and they’d be like ‘oh yeah, that’s right, you know it all’ ... Like they’d say ‘why didn’t you pass it there’ and then you’d go ‘well because I seen’ you know, and they go ‘oh yeah, you know it all’.

(Year 2, Club 11)

Concerned about the possible repercussions, players at this Championship club, for example, highlighted the way in which they were unable to answer back to anyone because of the relatively powerless position they perceived themselves as occupying at the club:

1. Of like the people who come in everyday, yeah the bottom.

4. Yeah like we can’t answer back or anything, we can’t say our opinion really.

2. And people always look to blame us for everything, like the kit man and that.

3. If there’s some blame they’ll look at us straight away ... like if some kit gets left out, or boots aren’t cleaned and stuff they just come straight to us.

(Year 2, Club 17)

Given the likely outcome that resulted from questioning the advice and criticism of their coaches, some players accepted that, unlike other forms of employment, swearing during team talks, before, during, and after matches can be understood as resulting from the almost constant pressure that surrounds the game (Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Parker, 1996). In this regard, swearing by coaches was not seen as offensive but as an accepted feature of everyday life, especially because not accepting what managers say may result in them being dropped from the team:

- 5. It's not something to offend you.
  - 2. It doesn't offend you.
  - 5. Doesn't offend you; it's just to get his point across.
  - 1. It's his nature.
  - 3. Adds a bit more affect to it ...
  - 1. It's a different environment though [to other industries].
  - 3. It's accepted in football ...
  - 5. You don't want to get on the bad side of the manager because he won't play you.
- (Year 1, Club 18)

In his study of the football apprenticeship in the 1990s, Parker (1996, p. 46) noted that within professional football, 'structures of hierarchical command ... sit comfortably within Max Weber's (1978) wider notion of bureaucratic organizational control, within which elements of discipline, authority and rationalization are necessarily inter-related'. The answers given by the players in this study revealed that such sub-cultures continue to exist and tend to centre upon the unequal distribution of power between coaches and players and that characterized the whole dynamic relational network (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998; Murphy & Sheard, 2006). Indeed, it should be noted that the 'bureaucratic organizational control' to which Parker draws attention between the coaches and players was also on display between different groups of players in and Academy or CoE, for the balance of power between the first and second year players was typically distributed unequally in favour of second year

players. In particular, when it came to undertaking jobs and other assorted tasks, second year players at clubs often felt that, because they were older, they had ‘the right’ to tell their first year players to complete them. It was not unfamiliar within the focus groups, therefore, for players to suggest similar things to those expressed by a group of players from a League One club:

2. They will all do the jobs, but if there is anything that needs to get finished off, they will say that the youngest will have to do it.

Q. Can you think of some certain things, things that get left?

4. Has to take the rubbish round to the bins.

2. Yeah, like upstairs we have to clean the bins, or do the washing up, or do the hoovering, or mop the floors, or clean the desks and, if it was clean the bins, we’d leave the rubbish bag at the bottom of the stairs, as we get dismissed the young ones have to go round and put the rubbish bag in the bin.

(Year 2, Club 10)

### **The fine system and player discipline**

One further way in which coaches and managers sought to control and regulate the behaviour of players at the majority of the Academies and CoE is through the implementation of a financial fine system, often by deducting monies from players’ wages for a range of perceived misdemeanours. The transgressions for which players were fined were similar between clubs in the sample and included: turning up late for training or matches; forgetting to do jobs, or not doing the jobs to the required standard; returning home beyond a pre-determined curfew; having dirty boots; and leaving the changing room in an unacceptable state. The following extract taken from a focus group with PL players highlights the varied nature of the offences that attract fines, and the amount of money players paid from their weekly wage should they transgress club rules:

- Q. What types of things do you get fined for?
3. For leaving trainies and that.
  2. Leaving trainies in the changing rooms.
  4. Dirty boots and that.
  2. Bottles, dirty boots.
- Q. And how much are you fined?
3. Only fivers and that ...
  2. It can be up to 20 quid and that though ... I mean, if you leave it, it goes a fiver up and all that.
- Q. So what's the biggest fine you'd get?
5. 'Bout 20 quid.
  3. No it's not, if you do something bad you can get fined well more than that.
  2. You can get fined a lot.
- Q. What's something bad? ...
5. Overweight, two weeks wages.
  1. If you're overweight you don't get paid.
  3. 2 weeks wages, you can get, things like that, if you fight or anything.
- (Year 2, Club 11)

It is important to understand that, like many things which were dictated by the coaches and managers, the rules to which players were expected to adhere varied between clubs. For example, the following group of players from a Championship club were subject to different rules from players at many other clubs:

- Q. So you get fines for other things as well do you?
1. Oh ye, like wearing earrings, no socks, shaves.
  3. No shoes, clean shaved.
  1. Being late ...
  7. Hair ...
  1. Long hair.
  3. Side burns.
  1. Black boots
- (Year 1, Club 13)

The fines system that is employed in all Academies and CoE has its roots in the long-term development of the game and is one further expression of the often very unequal power ratios (Elias, 1978; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998) characteristic of professional football, where

coaches and managers typically occupy more powerful positions in comparison to their young chargers (Parker, 1996). The general acceptance among players of the purpose of the fines system was manifest in the ways in which they not only made reference to how fines were used to discipline them, but also how this is a necessary part of their 'training' for the professional game, where they can be expected to face harsher financial penalties for breaking rules, usually set by the manager. In this regard, coaches typically used the system of fining players as a means of instilling discipline in them. When asked why coaches fined them, one group of players from a PL club said it was for:

- 3. Discipline.
- 1. Discipline, yeah.
- Q. Discipline?
- 3. Yeah, get you into the right habits.
- Q. Who told you it's about discipline?
- 5. No one.
- 2. The coaches.
- 8. Well, they say 'If you wanna be a professional, you have to act professionally'
- 4. You have to be disciplined.
- 2. Like you can't go into the first team and do what we do.
- 6. 'Cos if the first team are late they get fined 30 quid.
- (Year 1, Club 5)

While 'discipline' *per se* was cited as a key justification for the use of a fine system in football, they were also implemented as a further way of controlling the players' behaviour. For example, should players fail any of the tests that were implemented in order to monitor their physical condition, they were fined by the coaches, as the following group of players from a PL club explained:

- 4. Body fat.
- 1. We get hydration tested ... Like every Monday after the weekend we get a hydration test.
- 4. Body fat's once a month ...
- 5. Everyone drinks loads of water before so it's not needed.

1. Everyone drinks loads of water anyway because it's there for you here so...
  3. Plus you get fined if you don't so.
  1. Yeah, if you don't pass your hydration test then you get fined.
- (Year 1, Club 18)

While one of the main ways in which coaches attempted to control players with respect to their physical condition was through the implementation of fines, there were also examples at most clubs where coaches sought to use such tactics as humiliation in order to illicit a 'response' from players. These players, from a Championship club, noted the ways in which the results of certain tests were displayed in the changing rooms to symbolize to everyone who had performed poorly, particularly in relation to body fat:

7. They put you in red.
  6. They put you in red on the board.
- All. Laugh
4. And everyone sees you're fat.
  6. Everyone sees you're a fat bastard.
  1. You don't want that.
- Q. Where do they show this?
1. In the changing rooms ...
  4. In the entrance to the changing rooms.
- (Year 2, Club 8)

In view of the difficulties players encountered when seeking to convey the 'right attitude', this frequently became a topic of discussion that formed part of their daily routines, especially when they were on their own in changing rooms or whilst doing their jobs in the absence of coaches. Discussion of this kind often broke out during the focus groups with players when they made frequent reference, in particular, to the ways in which their lives away from the Academy or CoE were also scrutinized by coaches or managers. The next section, therefore, outlines the ways in which the time players spent away from the more

immediate confines of life in an Academy or CoE – that is, their leisure lives – were more-or-less constrained, in a variety of ways, because of their desire to become a professional footballer.

### **Becoming a professional footballer: The importance of making sacrifices**

The extent to which players exhibited the traits of a ‘good attitude’ having signed their scholarship forms was expressed further in the changes they claimed to have made to their lives away from the Academy or CoE, particularly in relation to their leisure lives. Having signed for their club, and committed themselves to the pursuit of a professional contract, players became increasingly constrained to modify aspects of their behaviour in their spare time to increase the chances of being offered a full-time professional contract at the end of their scholarship. To that end, players quickly became accustomed to using their leisure time for things such as preparation or recovery from training and matches, which usually included abstaining from, or reducing their consumption of, alcohol and going to bed early. In part, players were left with little choice but to go to bed early, or stay in on a week night, when their non-footballing friends were not because of the increasing demands that were coming to be placed upon them during the days at the Academy or CoE, and because they frequently wanted to perform to the best of their ability in training and matches. However, they simultaneously altered their behaviour to demonstrate further to club staff that they were prepared to make the necessary sacrifices in their leisure time to align their lives more closely with that of a professional player, and that this was commensurate with that of a player who exhibited a ‘good attitude’. The second development many players cited as playing a major part in changes in their leisure lives was the relocation many of them undertook prior to the commencement of their scholarship or apprenticeship. Moving away from home, usually into ‘digs’, with little opportunity to return home for prolonged periods of time regularly



contributed to players losing touch with members of their friendship networks that they had developed during their compulsory education and in other social settings. Notwithstanding the difficulties associated with this, the following extract from a focus group conducted at a League Two club illustrates how players were abundantly aware that such sacrifices were an essential part of becoming a professional footballer:

2. Well, it's clear from the start that you've got to make sacrifices, i.e. not seeing friends, family, going out and that 'cos if you wanna be the best, and play football, you need to make those sacrifices to get to the top.
1. And you can do all that once you have got your pro and that won't you?
2. [Interrupts] 'Cos then you have got spare time and that.
1. Just for these two years of your life you have got to give it your all.  
(Year 2, Club 21)

Similarly, when asked about their coaches' behaviour during matches, this group of players from a Championship club highlighted the ways in which a poor performance on the pitch often triggered questions from their coaches regarding the sacrifices they were required to make and, in particular, the seriousness with which they approached them:

3. Just looking at our lifestyles outside of football, sacrificing things for football.
1. Things you should be allowed to do basically. Like 'Why are you doing this?'...
3. Just 'cos we play bad.
- Q. What types of things do they say you should be sacrificing?
1. They say we should be sacrificing our friends really.
3. Yeah we should be going home after training and just sitting there looking at our bedroom walls.  
(Year 2, Club 19)

Another group of first year players at a Championship club commented that, by comparison to young people of a similar age, they had been required to modify their lives since becoming a scholar by avoiding the activities that form part of many youth leisure lifestyles (Furlong &

Cartmel, 2007; Miles, 2000; Roberts, 2006). When asked to explain what sacrifices had to be made, they said:

2. Parties.
  3. Going out.
  4. Parties before games. Like Friday nights you can't go
  6. [Interrupts] Early nights. Up early in the morning.
  3. Yeah, getting up at quarter to seven.
  1. You are always tired so can't really be bothered to do 'owt after.
  5. Yeah, when I get home, I can't be bothered to do 'owt.
  3. But it becomes a lifestyle dun't it? Instead of doing what you used to.
- (Year 1, Club 13)

For those players who claimed to drink, in general, the frequency with which they consumed alcohol each week was lower than other young people of a similar age. Whilst nearly two thirds of players (63%) did not consume alcohol at all (Table 4.1), this figure was lower in other young people aged between 16 and 24 (45%) (Office for National Statistics [ONS], 2009). On average, the majority of players who did consume alcohol, did so on one day per week (36%), which was higher than other young people their age (24%), while a greater proportion (31%) of 16-24-year-olds did so two days or more each week (ONS, 2009) when compared to players (0.6%). It also became clear in the focus groups that many players have a different relationship with alcohol and the establishments in which they consume it compared to young males of a similar age. Whilst visiting nightclubs, bars, pubs and parties was something that some of the players valued and enjoyed as popular youth leisure activities (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Miles, 2000; Roberts, 2006), because of the sacrifices they had to make, players were unable to derive the much sought-after independence in their leisure time by socializing to the same extent as their friends (Heinz, 2009; Miles, 2000; Roberts, 1996).

For the majority of players who did claim to drink, this was typically confined to a Saturday night when all league fixtures had been played and because Sunday is, as a rule, a day off. This pattern of drinking was explained by a group of players at a PL club who, when asked when they usually drank, replied in a manner similar to other players:

2. Saturday nights.

4. Yeah, Saturday nights.

Q. What would you do?

4. Get steaming. Few Malibu, Pineapples.

1. A few?

3. I think you have got to chill and just relax and get away from football a bit. When you do have a bit of time off it is good.

(Year 2, Club 20)

The majority of scholars who consumed alcohol frequently did so at house parties with friends, partly because of the popularity of house parties among 16-18-year-olds (Roberts, 2004), but also because they were not old enough to gain access to nightclubs or bars, or be served alcohol. As the following extract from a focus group held at a PL club indicates:

**Table 4.1 Average number of days players spent drinking alcohol by club**

Number of days	Club																					
	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>Total</b>
0	6	8	9	3	6	9	9	10	11	9	10	8	6	13	15	8	8	9	9	14	11	191
																						(63.0)
1	9	0	5	12	8	5	0	6	3	7	7	10	10	3	5	1	4	2	1	9	3	110
																						(36.3)
2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
																						(0.3)
3 or more	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
																						(0.3)
Total players	<b>16</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>303</b>
																						<b>(100.0)</b>

- Q. How about at the weekend then?
3. Forget the week.
2. Party.
- Q. Most weekends or?
3. Yeah, there's normally something about.
5. Any chance of inviting me?
- All. Laugh
5. I ain't seen the parties.
2. No they ain't his parties.
- Q. So what would you be going out in town or what?
4. Like gatherings, stuff like that, I don't go out to clubs so I'm not old enough and I don't look old enough.
- Q. Do any of you go out to clubs on a weekend?
1. It depends if it's under 18s.
3. Yeah.
1. Then you would with your friends.
- (Year 2, Club 9)

It was also the case that house parties allowed players to be less visible in the community and, as a result, reduced the risk of them being seen out by people from the club or others who might report them. This was a common concern for all players who consumed alcohol on nights out, as the following excerpt illustrates from a focus group held with PL players:

1. Depends really, it depends what sort of day it is.
2. Erm, I'm not a clubbing guy, I don't go out clubbing.
1. Nice Thursday night down the student night, down the old [pub name] ... Well not [place name], I usually go round [place name] or something like that.
- Q. In [place name] because?
1. Further away from here ... If you come in [place name] then you are obviously close to the club and that, 'cos they don't like you going out full-stop, so like if you're going out round [place name], you're like stepping on the door-step. I try and stay as far away as possible.
- (Year 2, Club 5)

It is important to note, however, that when players socialized with friends they were often constrained to behave in socially acceptable ways because when they are away from the

Academy or CoE it is possible that other club staff could report their behaviour to key personnel such as coaches and managers who often reprimand them for doing so (Chapter Six). These dilemmas encountered by players in this respect were explained by the following group of players from a Championship club, whose comments are illustrative of other players in the study:

3. Well, if they [coaches] know you play for the club, they can say that you've been causing trouble up there and it will get back to the club then, so you have to behave yourself like ...

4. Yeah, it's all part of the responsibility. We can have fun but we know we've got to be more concentrated on the football because that's the most important thing.

6. They're [coaches] not doing it to be horrible and that just give us a line and that and we'll become better people and better players.

Q. Can you think of an example where something has got back?

2. Yeah I think there was some trouble last year one of the boys went to town, had a bit of a drink like and I think he got in a bit of trouble and it come back to the club but I think he was lucky, nothing happened.

Q. Did it get back to the club because they knew they were players in town?

2. Yeah I think it was, I think they knew he was a player.

4. You'd be surprised how many people end up knowing you as well.

(Year 1, Club 19)

The pattern of alcohol use among players compared to those of other young people helps shed light on the ways in which scholars' social lives develop differentially. Whilst other young people are visiting parties, nightclubs, pubs and bars and consuming alcohol each week (Miles, 2000; Roberts, 2006), players are typically restricted to going out one evening each week. By spending time in these settings, friends spend more time developing their social networks, gaining independence and exploring personal boundaries (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2011; Roberts, 2006), while many players are less likely to be able to do so as frequently because of their occupational obligations. This pattern of behaviour was recognized by the players who often highlighted that their non-footballing friends were able to lead different leisure lives to themselves with respect to their engagement with alcohol and

nightclubs, bars, pubs and parties. The following group of players from a PL club noted how their friends were able to go out on more nights than themselves:

4. Like your mates can go out can't they on a Friday night or something? But ... sometimes it's better to stay in anyway.
  5. You've got to prepare yourself better for the next day compared to what your friends do. So, for example, sometimes some of them are starting college at 9, getting in the house about 6 in the morning. Like if we'd done that people could like see from your performance.
  - Q. So are you saying you can't go out then?
  2. No. You can go out but just
  5. [Interrupts] Like if you got a free day or something.
  3. Yeah if you got a free day the day after.
- (Year 1, Club 18)

When asked to compare their leisure lives with their friends, another group of second year players at a League One club similarly claimed that:

2. It's not much different.
  4. They are jealous to be fair.
  5. They are jealous but then they're completely free aren't they.
  3. There are loads of things that we shouldn't do that they can do.
  - Q. There are loads of things that they can do, tat you can't? Such as what?
  3. Well sort of we have got rules as if we can't go out on the Friday night before a game
  5. [Interrupts] Or a Thursday.
  3. Or a Thursday, but obviously they can go out whenever they want.
- (Year 2, Club 10)

It became clear that, in order to 'make it' as a professional footballer, players were not only expected to take on sub-cultural expectations surrounding their conduct within an Academy or CoE, but that time spent away from the club is just as important in demonstrating to the coach and manager that they have the 'right attitude'. In that regard, their relationship with friends, girlfriends, alcohol, and nights out are particularly vulnerable because of the demands

of their scholarship or apprenticeship. When considering their leisure time, therefore, many of the players believe that their non-footballing friends were less constrained to undertake activities they desired than themselves.

### *Spending little time with mates and girlfriends*

In addition to the sanctions players claimed to make in relation to the consumption of alcohol and visiting parties, nightclubs, bars and pubs, they also had to forgo a number of other popular activities among young people in order to improve their chances of gaining a professional contract. Among the other activities players were expected to undertake less frequently, if at all, was socializing with friends and spending more time with girlfriends, which are of particular importance for many other young people (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Miles, 2000). Indeed, in view of the requirement on them to place greater emphasis on the gaining a professional contract, many players claimed that they had lost contact with many school friends and had failed to develop new friendship networks because of the limited leisure time available to them within their lengthening and increasingly complex interdependency networks (Elias, 1978; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998). For many players, the reality of professional football was that the environment was not conducive to spending time with friends, or cultivating relationships with girlfriends, for there was rarely time left for socializing with friends outside of the demands of training, and travelling to and from playing matches. One group of players from a PL club, for example, said:

1. It is like, I only have a few proper mates now. Like when I go home, there's only a few people I will go and see.
3. For example, say like if someone [said] ... 'Oh, come out' like, say on a Friday, they would go 'There's a party or sumut' then obviously you'd have to be like 'Na, I've got a game tomorrow'
5. Even if it is a late kick off, we still don't



1. [Interrupts] Yeah like and that's what I mean ... you might be close with a lot of your mates but then if they start getting into the wrong thing you have to
  2. [Interrupts] You have to stay away.
  1. You have to ditch them like so you end up with
  2. [Interrupts] No mates.
  1. Having to get rid of your mates.
- (Year 2, Club 20)

Reflecting on the ways in which their lives had changed since they had become full-time workers, players at a Championship club explained that considerable strain had come to bear upon the friendship groups they had developed from an early age:

- Q. How have things changed for you?
1. Moved away from home.
  3. Yeah, we moved away from home so we become more independent like and we don't see our family and like our old friends as much. Like the only boys we really bother with here now is the football, boys.
  4. Definitely that. Like even though I'm still living at home, I don't see my friends from school as much; I just see these boys more.
- Q. Why is that?
1. Yeah, because basically the same like, because you used to see the boys at school every day, now you're changing, you see the football boys every day.
  3. Yeah, we're with the same boys everyday so you tend to go out [with them].
- (Year 1, Club 19)

A further example of the ways in which undertaking a scholarship had impacted negatively upon their leisure time and, as a consequence, their friendship groups, was highlighted by the following groups of players from a PL club. When asked about what they did in their leisure time, these made reference to the ways in which tiredness can impact on their ability and desire to undertake other leisure activities that used invariably as part of young people's highly individualized leisure biographies and activities (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Roberts, 2006; Wyn, 2009):

6. Go to sleep.
  2. I'm always on Facebook me.
  5. Smash COD [Call of Duty] 24/7.
  1. Listen to music.
  2. On Saturday you go out like.
  3. Depends like 'cos some of us are in the lodge.
  6. Weekday you are just too tired to do anything.
  1. Play my music.
  7. You don't have a life in the week ...
  2. You are that tired, you're exhausted.
  3. You don't have a life 'cos when you come home
  6. [Interrupts] You finish late.
  5. Usually we have school work after some nights as well, that's till 6, and so you don't get home till half 6, 7.
- (Year 1, Club 11)

It was clear from the players' comments that the changing dynamics of their friendship groups were among the most significant sacrifices they had to make in order to pursue a career in professional football. For some players, signing a contract aged 16 also impacted on the ways in which they interacted with girls, where they met them, how much time they spent with them, and their status as footballers among them and their friends. Indeed, many of the players claimed that forming relationships with girls was easier because of the line of employment they were pursuing, for professional football was frequently seen by females as a highly desirable profession with which to be associated. Notwithstanding this, the lifestyles players were more-or-less constrained to lead because of their commitment to football meant that they found it difficult to cultivate those relationships. As one PL player put it:

3. It's the amount of opportunities for your mates, like suddenly people think 'Football and money'. Do you know what I mean? And girls think this, that and the other, but they don't understand we're only apprentices [players] and they want you to come out, and they love it. Some girls love it just because you play football and they all want you to go out. And how tempting it is 'cos you know if you go out you can get 'a bang' [have sex] or something, and it's so tempting sometimes, but you just have to say 'No', which is hard.
- (Year 2, Club 5)

Whilst relationships with girls and ‘girlfriends’ and matters such as sex were important topics discussed by players, the relationships they were able to forge with females were further inhibited by several club rules. One rule was the prohibition of girls visiting players while they are living in digs. In a general conversation about their feelings about living in digs, the following group of PL players highlighted how this rule can be frustrating at a time in their lives when developing relationships with girls were centrally valued:

- 2. We are not allowed girls in our digs.
  - 5. One other guy from our team, his room was really messy so they kicked him out of digs. So he had to go home and travel in like half an hour every day.
  - Q. No girls?
  - 2. No, no girls in our rooms.
  - 5. No girls in digs. We are 16, 17-year-old boys.
  - 1. Like we have to ask permission for them to even come into the house.
  - 5. No, they’re not allowed in rooms, and only allowed in downstairs rooms only.
  - Q. Why not?
  - 5. It’s the rules.
  - Q. What is the purpose of the rule?
  - 2. I don’t know; there is no purpose here. It is just being busy now.
  - 7. Basically, so you can’t get alone with a girl.
  - 1. The club control you when you are in digs anyway.
- (Year 1, Club 20)

Contrary to popular perceptions that are often claimed in journalistic accounts of professional footballers’ lives, the players perceived their lives to be rather different to those of other young people their age. When discussing the relationship they had with their friends for example, the following group of first year players at a Championship club noted:

- 4. They think you play football. Get paid. Go home. But they don’t understand that we still got education, jobs to do. Like sometimes I’m up at 7 and don’t leave there sometimes till 5
- 3. [Interrupts] And that you have to sacrifice a lot of time, like to go out, do this and that.

5. Yeah, there is no time to go out
  3. [Interrupts] It's a restricted life innit? ...
  4. There is no time to go out.
  2. You have to be in every day ...
  4. You have to make sure you go to bed at the right time because you need to prepare right or the next morning's training for your whole life.
  2. You can't make plans with friends at all.
- (Year 1, Club 8)

Despite the supposed elevated status they receive as young footballers, players felt that they were more-or-less restricted to exercise the cultural power this status affords them. With particular reference to girls and friends, it seems players were constrained to place more emphasis on the demands of football rather than developing relationships with those people around them as they negotiated the inherently transitional life-stage of youth (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2011; Wyn, 2009). Central to this process is the requirement of many players to move into digs provided by their Academy or CoE, often coincides with a move away from already developed friendship groups.

## Summary

The data presented in this chapter suggest that a central part of the sub-cultures to which players in Academies and CoE are constrained to conform relates to the need for them to display a 'good attitude' (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000) to significant others, particularly their managers. Indeed, players were socialized almost immediately upon entering their club into learning what constitutes a 'good attitude', which they were expected to demonstrate to increase their chances of gaining a professional contract. Despite only being a matter of weeks into their scholarship or apprenticeship when the research was conducted, all of the first year players in this study recognized the characteristics they needed to adopt in order to be seen as having a 'good attitude'. In a similar way to professional footballers

(Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006), what constitutes a 'good attitude' at different clubs was very much dependent upon the idiosyncrasies of managers and coaches between clubs. That having been said, as noted earlier, there were certain common expectations to which all players had to conform. This enabled them to avoid being stigmatized (Goffman, 1963) as being 'big time' by those who occupied relatively powerful positions in their interdependency networks, as well as themselves who were complicit in generating constraints over themselves and others to act in socially acceptable ways (Elias, 1978). The next chapter illustrates how this was also evident in players' experiences of education.

## Chapter Five

### **Players' Views and Experiences of Education**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter examined several key aspects of the culture of professional football that came to impact on players' day-to-day experiences of working in their respective Academy or CoE. These experiences, it is argued, provide an important backdrop to making sociological sense of the ways in which the educational programmes players followed were provided by clubs, and how these were experienced by players who were socialized into a largely anti-academic culture that underpins professional football. In this regard, the central objectives of this chapter are to explore players' perceptions and experiences of: (i) the process of education and schooling; (ii) the educational courses they undertook in clubs; and (iii) the relationship between those courses and their desire to gain a full-time professional contract. In order to contextualize players' views of education and of the programmes they were expected to complete as part of the ASE programme, it is first important to examine the delivery of educational programmes in clubs.

#### **The delivery of educational programmes by clubs**

With the exception of four non-British players (one at clubs 4, 6, 20 and 21), all of the players were studying for some kind of educational qualification as part of the ASE programme when the study was conducted. As Table 5.1 indicates, the number and kind of qualifications players were studying varied between clubs and within and between the four leagues, though the BTEC National Certificate (114 players) or National Diploma (82 players) were the most

common qualifications provided for players. Other qualifications, such as an AS- or A-Level (three and five players, respectively), were considerably less common and just four players reported studying for additional qualifications (A-Level, AS-Level, and GCSE) outside of the formal educational programmes on offer at clubs. It was also clear from the players' comments that educational programmes were delivered by clubs in three main ways (Table 5.2). Seven clubs provided players with education 'in-house' at the club's stadium or training complex, and teachers or EWOs employed by the club delivered the sessions to players. A further four clubs outsourced responsibility for the delivery of education to a local sixth-form college where players were educated alongside, but not with, other students attending the college. The remaining 11 clubs adopted both these approaches to its education provision, where some aspects of their courses (typically the football-related NVQ) were conducted 'in-house' at the club and the remaining components were completed at a local partner college (usually the BTEC element of the programme). Although all players were expected to complete 12 hours of education each week as expected by the ASE programme, the average amount of time players spent following their education programmes and how this time was organized varied between clubs. As Table 5.3 indicates, despite the ASE requirement that all players should spend 12 hours per week studying for their educational qualifications, nearly two-fifths of players claimed to spend 7-9 hours per week on average completing their educational courses, one-quarter of players reported spending 4-6 hours doing so, and just over two-in-ten players claimed to devote 10-12 hours per week on average to their education. The majority of clubs preferred to deliver their educational courses over 2-3 days each week on average (18 clubs), one club did so one day per week, and players at two clubs reported that their education was delivered over five days each week (Table 5.4).

**Table 5.1 Qualification undertaken by players by club (%)**

	<b>No. of players</b>	<b>AS- Level</b>	<b>A- Level</b>	<b>B-TEC First Diploma</b>	<b>B-TEC National Award</b>	<b>B-TEC National Cert.</b>	<b>B-TEC National Diploma</b>	<b>GNVQ/ NVQ</b>
1	16	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (12.5)	1 (6.3)	7 (43.8)	3 (18.8)	2 (12.5)
2	8	1 (12.5)	2 (25.0)	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	4 (25.0)	5 (62.5)
3	14	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.1)	1 (7.1)	1 (7.1)	8 (57.1)	0 (0.0)
4	15	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (53.3)	0 (0.0)
5	14	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (14.3)	12 (85.7)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.1)
6	14	1 (7.1)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	2 (14.3)	1 (7.1)	1 (7.1)	6 (42.9)
7	9	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (11.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	8 (72.7)	1 (11.1)
8	16	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (25.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	13 (81.3)	6 (37.5)
9	14	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	10 (71.4)	0 (0.0)	2 (14.3)	8 (57.1)
10	16	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	1 (6.3)	9 (56.3)	1 (6.3)	1 (6.3)	0 (0.0)
11	17	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (17.6)	9 (52.9)	2 (11.8)	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)
12	18	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (11.1)	5 (27.8)	7 (38.9)	7 (38.9)	0 (0.0)
13	17	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (17.6)	7 (41.2)	6 (35.3)	0 (0.0)
14	16	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (6.3)	4 (25.0)	14 (87.5)	2 (12.5)	0 (0.0)
15	20	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (15.0)	4 (20.0)	14 (70.0)	5 (25.0)	0 (0.0)
16	9	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	9 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)



**Table 5.1 (cont.) Qualification undertaken by players by club (%)**

	<b>No. of players</b>	<b>AS- Level</b>	<b>A- Level</b>	<b>B-TEC First Diploma</b>	<b>B-TEC National Award</b>	<b>B-TEC National Cert.</b>	<b>B-TEC National Diploma</b>	<b>GNVQ/ NVQ</b>
17	12	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	7 (58.3)	5 (41.7)	0 (0.0)
18	11	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (36.4)	0 (0.0)	2 (18.2)
19	10	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (50.0)	5 (50.0)	6 (60.0)
20	23	0 (0.0)	1 (4.3)	9 (39.1)	1 (4.3)	12 (52.2)	1 (4.3)	0 (0.0)
21	14	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	11 (78.6)	2 (14.3)	0 (0.0)
Total	303 (100.0)	3 (1.0)	5 (1.7)	29 (9.6)	52 (17.2)	114 (37.6)	82 (27.1)	37 (12.2)

**Table 5.2 Location of players' educational programme**

<b>Club</b>	<b>Division</b>	<b>Main Education Site</b>	<b>Secondary Education Site</b>
1	League 2	Club	
2	League 2	Club	College
3	League 1	College	
4	League 1	Club	
5	Premier League	Club	College
6	League 2	Club	College
7	Championship	Club	
8	Championship	Club	
9	Premier League	Club	
10	League 2	Club	College
11	Premiership	Club	College
12	League 2	College	At the Club
13	Championship	College	
14	Championship	College	At the Club
15	Championship	College	At the Club
16	Championship	Club	
17	Championship	College	
18	Premier League	Club	
19	Championship	Club	College
20	Premier League	Club	College
21	League 2	College	

**Table 5.3 Average hours spent per week studying for an educational qualification (n and %)**

<b>Club</b>	<b>No. of Players</b>	<b>1-3 Hours</b>	<b>4-6 Hours</b>	<b>7-9 Hours</b>	<b>10-12 Hours</b>	<b>13 Hours or More</b>
1	16	1 (6.3)	2 (12.5)	6 (37.5)	7 (43.8)	0 (0.0)
2	8	0 (0.0)	2 (25.0)	3 (37.5)	3 (37.5)	0 (0.0)
3	14	2 (14.3)	8 (57.1)	3 (21.4)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)
4	15	1 (6.7)	4 (26.7)	8 (53.3)	2 (13.3)	0 (0.0)
5	14	0 (0.0)	4 (28.6)	7 (50.0)	3 (21.4)	0 (0.0)
6	14	2 (13.3)	7 (50.0)	5 (35.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
7	9	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	9 (100.0)	0 (0.0)
8	16	1 (6.3)	13 (81.3)	2 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
9	14	4 (28.6)	9 (64.3)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)
10	16	1 (6.3)	3 (18.8)	12 (75.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
11	17	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.9)	11 (64.7)	3 (17.6)
12	18	1 (5.6)	2 (11.1)	11 (61.1)	1 (5.6)	3 (17.6)
13	17	3 (17.6)	0 (0.0)	12 (70.6)	2 (11.8)	0 (0.0)
14	16	1 (6.3)	4 (25.0)	4 (25.0)	7 (43.8)	0 (0.0)
15	20	5 (25.0)	5 (25.0)	10 (50.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
16	9	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	9 (100.0)	0 (0.0)
17	12	0 (0.0)	3 (25.0)	6 (50.0)	3 (25.0)	0 (0.0)
18	11	0 (0.0)	1 (9.1)	7 (63.6)	3 (27.3)	0 (0.0)
19	10	0 (0.0)	2 (20.0)	4 (40.0)	4 (40.0)	0 (0.0)
20	23	0 (0.0)	11 (47.8)	12 (52.2)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
21	14	3 (21.4)	1 (7.1)	3 (21.4)	4 (28.6)	3 (21.4)

**Table 5.4 Average days per week spent studying for an educational qualification (n and %)**

<b>Club</b>	<b>No. of Players</b>	<b>1 Day</b>	<b>2 Days</b>	<b>3 Days</b>	<b>4 Days</b>	<b>5 Days</b>
1	16	2 (12.5)	14 (87.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
2	8	1 (12.5)	1 (12.5)	6 (75.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
3	14	13 (92.9)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
4	15	0 (0.0)	13 (86.7)	2 (13.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
5	14	2 (14.3)	0 (0.0)	11 (78.6)	0 (0.0)	1 (7.1)
6	14	2 (13.3)	8 (57.1)	3 (21.4)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)
7	9	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (12.5)	8 (88.9)
8	16	5 (31.3)	9 (56.3)	2 (12.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
9	14	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	14 (100.0)
10	16	4 (25.0)	11 (68.8)	1 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
11	17	6 (35.3)	2 (11.8)	4 (23.5)	0 (0.0)	5 (29.4)
12	18	0 (0.0)	17 (94.4)	0 (0.0)	1 (5.6)	0 (0.0)
13	17	0 (0.0)	16 (94.1)	1 (5.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
14	16	0 (0.0)	15 (93.8)	1 (6.3)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
15	20	0 (0.0)	18 (90.0)	2 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
16	9	0 (0.0)	9 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
17	12	1 (8.3)	11 (91.7)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
18	11	0 (0.0)	11 (100.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
19	10	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	9 (90.0)	1 (10.0)	0 (0.0)
20	23	2 (8.7)	11 (47.8)	10 (43.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)
21	14	2 (14.3)	6 (42.9)	5 (35.7)	1 (7.1)	0 (0.0)

## **Players' predispositions towards education and schooling**

In order to adequately explain the comments players expressed about the educational courses they undertook in clubs it is important to understand something of their perceptions and experiences of education generally. In this regard, it was clear that for many players compulsory education was something to which they had, at best, developed an irreverent attitude, and at worst was something that they reflected upon with some hostility and criticism. The largely negative educational experiences many players recalled in relation to their compulsory schooling were traceable to their personal and group habituses (Dunning, 2002; Elias, 2001), and to the longstanding antipathy they held towards the process of academic learning (Miles, 2000; Monk & Olsson, 2006). They were also related to the 'counter-school culture' (Willis, 2009 [1978]) that appeared to have developed among many players and which predisposed them to view the process of education and schooling with some resentment and suspicion. An indication of the largely negative experiences players had of their education before joining their current club was evident in the comments of one group of players from a PL club who said:

- 2. When you go school, there can be days when you are not on it and you just like glide through school
  - 5. [Interrupts] You can just not give a shit.
  - 2. But here you have to be on it every single day.
  - 3. Yeah, you have to be on it every day, but it has gone quick since we've been here ...
  - 2. School was so boring ... Boring as; I hate school.
  - 7. The only good thing was like seeing your mates every day.
- (Year 1, Club 20)

Another group of players who were employed by a League Two club were also of the view that the kinds of schooling they experienced was not relevant to their needs and, as a consequence, were inclined to describe school in largely negative terms:

- 8. If I you didn't have to do it, then I wouldn't do it.
  - 3. Do a course that you are interested in.
  - 2. I'd do it, would you?
  - Q. How many wouldn't do it then if you had the choice?
  - 8. I wouldn't, school is shit, so is this.
- (Year 2, Club 1)

Although many players from all four divisions of the FL often perceived school as being 'boring', they nevertheless positively valued the ways in which going to school enabled them to develop friendships, meet girls, and enjoy the informal time they spent with others in their peer groups outside of the classroom. Reflecting upon the enjoyment and sociability they valued whilst being at school, one group of players from a PL club, for example, said:

- 5. I enjoyed a part of school but that was just seeing my friends really.
  - 4. I enjoyed dinner and breaks, but lessons, no.
  - 7. It was just boring; hell.
  - 1. You don't want to be stuck in a classroom.
- (Year 1, Club 12)

Whilst there existed among players a near universal view that they enjoyed the social aspects of compulsory schooling, it was also widely acknowledged that the formal, adult-led dimension of their social relations generally (van Krieken, 1998; Goudsblom & Mennell, 1998) and in school in particular (Willis, 2009 [1978]) was experienced much more negatively. Indeed, in a number of clubs, the more relaxed approach adopted by some of the EWO, or tutors was discussed in more positive terms by the players. For example, the following group of players from a Championship club noted:

- 1. It's not like a classroom, there's round a table there's five of you so if there are any questions then you can ask, and it's a lot more approachable with the coaches and a lot of one on one help if you need it.
- 5. I think in education you get treated more like an adult in here. Like we would be at school, you have got to raise your hand if you want to talk in school.

3. That's the good thing about it as well, it's not as if you are in school. When you are in school. You feel like you are locked in prison or something. Here you just get your head down and just do your work and then you are done.  
(Year 1, Club 16)

In this regard, there was clear agreement among the sample of players in this study that insofar as compulsory schooling was positively valued, this depended for the most part upon the extent to which it was perceived as being enjoyable, sociable, and an opportunity to interact with a significant degree and 'acceptable forms of informality' (Kilminster, 1998, p. 152) with friends. The central value that many players placed upon the supposedly non-educational aspects of schooling and, in particular, the sociability that may have been generated in educational contexts appeared to outweigh their concern with whether schooling had real educational value for them, and were closely associated with the increasing informalization of social relations (Kilminster, 1998; Wouters, 1977, 1987, 2007, 2011) in modern societies such as Britain. This emphasis that players placed on the enjoyable, social side of their education, and the extent to which they valued the informal nature of adult-tutor relations, was evident in their responses to questions around education. In that respect, that players often valued – indeed, evidently preferred – this degree of informality with teachers was clear from the comments of one group of Championship footballers. These players felt that college was 'miles better' than school because it was not as strict or formal and enabled them to 'have a laugh' with mates:

1. Miles better.

6. A lot better.

Q In what way?

1. It's not as strict I don't think.

2. It's more relaxed.

7. More relaxed 'cos you can have a laugh with t'coaches and that ...

3. Yeah, they don't make you do 'em (coursework tasks) though. They don't force it on you; you just do it.

- 2. You do it because you want to be a footballer.
  - 7. They do have a laugh with you though.
- (Year 1, Club 17)

The central value that players placed on the ‘banter’ that characterized their relations with college tutors was also revealed in a focus group conducted with players at a PL club who compared the more informal manner of learning at college with their experiences of school thus:

- 3. You can just relax because obviously you are out of football and like you get your time to relax like after football all the time.
  - 4. Just be yourself ...
  - 6. Banter.
  - 3. Yeah, a lot of banter. You’d just see everyone being happy and that ...
  - 2. It’s just banter; it is just football banter ... like you don’t feel like you are at school ... you are around your teammates and you are thinking, ‘I just can’t be bothered to do any work’.
- (Year 1, Club 20)

It was evident that the deep-seated predispositions and largely negative attitudes players held towards education were shaped by members of the more central interdependencies (e.g. parents, teachers, friends) into which these interviewees were born. These predispositions subsequently became deeply embedded and internalized in their emerging habituses and personality structures that had been developed during the more impressionable phases of childhood and youth (Elias, 1978, 2001; van Krieken, 1998). Indeed, it appeared from many of the players’ comments that by the time they had reached the end of compulsory schooling, that is, before they became full-time workers in their clubs, they had already begun to develop a habitus in which education was a marginal interest. In a similar manner to the working-class lads in Willis’s (1978) study, players’ early experiences of schooling played an important role in shaping their habits and taste for education, and in generating among them

insufficient educational capital and other cultural resources to prepare them for undertaking their educational programmes whilst pursuing their footballing career. The next section illustrates how players' socially produced and reproduced processes of habitus formation (Dunning, 1999; Elias, 1978, 2001) were also important to understanding the experiences they recalled in relation to the club-based educational programmes they studied.

### **Players' views and experiences of the ASE programme**

The kinds of perceptions players recalled in relation to their early experiences of education and schooling more broadly also found expression in their comments concerning the ASE programme that they were required to undertake. In this regard, the ways in which players appeared to think and act in relation to education was grounded in the educational predispositions (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Roberts, 2006; Willis, 2009 [1978]) that had been formed earlier in life. When asked for their thoughts about how the courses they were following as part of the ASE programme, it was not altogether surprising to find that almost all players discussed their experiences of these courses in largely negative terms, as in the following example taken from a group of players from a League Two club who described their education as 'boring':

7. It is boring.
  5. It's a ball ache ...
  6. It is boring.
  2. We want to go into a classroom.
  3. If we went to proper college it would be better, but it is just us in a room on our own.
  1. No one wants to be there.
- (Year 2, Club 1)



Similarly, a group of players from a PL club described education as ‘shit’. For some players this was because the programme was thought to be too difficult, whilst for others the boredom they recalled in relation to their studies was related to the ease with which they were able to complete the tasks required of them. The players said:

- 3. It’s shit.
  - 7. Shit.
  - 5. Hard.
  - 3. It’s too much hours.
  - 2. It’s hard, you know.
  - 6. It’s not, it’s easy as fuck. You just copy lad!
  - 5. No, it is easy.
  - 2. You’re doing GCSEs!
  - 3. No, we need to tell ’em this: that college work is a joke lad!
- (Year 2, Club 11)

For other players in the sample the largely negative attitudes they expressed in relation to their educational experiences was closely related to the times of the day at which they were expected to complete the educational component of the ASE programme. For example, one group of players from a League Two associated their dislike of the programme with the ‘long days’ they were expected to complete whilst undertaking their apprenticeship in the following way:

- 5. It is like no one wants to do the course we’re on.
  - 2. It is just long days.
  - 3. They just make us do it don’t they?
  - 5. We just get chucked on the course.
  - 2. And it is long days isn’t it?
- (Year 2, Club 12)

Another group of players from a PL club explained that they went to college all day for one day per week and then completed part of their education between 4pm and 6pm at their club once they had completed their training and jobs. When asked whether completing aspects of their courses after training impacted on their engagement with education and ability to complete the work they were set, the players replied:

- 2. It just drags on; you're so tired.
  - 4. That drags on yeah, you are tired. You are just tired after footie.
  - 3. You've got [name of the EWO] nagging at you to do like
  - 4. [Interrupts] Yeah, and you'll do something wrong.
  - 7. You can't get 5 minutes to get a shower.
  - 3. Me and [player's name] were talking last week and we were kicked out 'cos we were just that tired we just didn't wanna do the work and we were standing outside for about 20 minutes.
- (Year 1, Club 11)

When players were required to attend college more than once per week this was also said to impact negatively on their ability to learn, for once they had completed training they preferred to go home instead of completing their studies:

- 7. And because you are staying back till about half six or something stupid like that but at college they (friends away from football) get to go after 12 o'clock ...
  - 3. Once you have been training and then college, you just want to go home.
  - 1. You don't want to learn anything.
  - 2. You just have to sit there for about two hours, just doing work.
  - 5. It's boring isn't it?
- (Year 2, Club 1)

The difficulties players claimed to experience from managing their education alongside training and match commitments was also brought out by a group of second year players

from a League Two club. In particular, they commented that it was difficult to combine their studies with playing for the club's reserve team on a week day evening, for if the team were playing away it was not uncommon for them to return home late but they were still expected to attend college the following day. Accordingly, as the following extract indicates, this meant some players frequently 'fell behind' with their work and others found it 'mentally draining' to complete their educational programmes having played the previous evening:

2. It is difficult though 'cos a lot of reserve games are on Wednesday, so that means we miss Wednesday's. So a lot of people fall behind. Like this year we have only had one Wednesday so far, like because of a reserve game ...

5. I think most people would rather just take an easy day, and maybe just swim, have an easy jog or something like that. I don't think it would involve a 9 to 5 college day 'cos that's quite mentally draining when you've just had a week's work

3. [Interrupts] If you've had a rezzy [reserve] game in the week or something. You've had a reserve game on Tuesday night and you don't get home till like 12 o'clock or something and then you are in at 9 o'clock the next day.

(Year 1, Club 21)

As Parker (1996) has noted, playing for the reserves represented an important opportunity for players to develop themselves and maximize their chances of being offered a professional contract. Indeed, not only was playing with the reserves likely to improve their chances of being seen by the first team manager, it was also an opportunity to mix with professional players and, thus, develop their understanding of what behaviour was, and was not, acceptable among professionals. In that respect, any chance to play with the reserves was seen as the 'next step' for many of the players towards a professional contract, and it was not altogether surprising that almost all players prioritized playing for the reserves over any concern they had regarding the impact this would have on their education. Indeed, the central value players placed upon their footballing success in general, the opportunities playing in the reserves gave them to mix with professional players, and the tiredness and negative

experiences they associated with having to catch-up on educational work outside of the normal allotted time when involved with the reserves, appeared to strengthen the counter-culture (Parker, 1996; Willis, 2009 [1978]) they had developed towards education up to this point. It also strengthened their 'second nature' (Elias, 1978, 2001) or habitus in which a preference for playing football dominated their preferred self-identities (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1963), rather than their educational success.

**'It's not really education; it's just like copy and paste'**

For the majority of players in the sample the theoretical components of the ASE programme were perceived to be 'easy' not least because players were able, and sometimes instructed, to copy out work from a variety of sources to complete their written coursework. Indeed, players from all clubs in the study explained that they had personally copied material from the internet, textbooks, from other players, or from their tutors. When asked for their thoughts on the difficulty of the educational courses they were completing, one group of players from a PL club replied:

- 7. It is easy.
- 3. Yeah, it is easy.
- Q. Why is it easy?
- 3. Well you just copy and paste at the end of the day.
- All. Laugh
- 5. Sometimes it is hard to concentrate though.
- 8. I just copy everything he does.
- (Year 1, Club 20)

In a not dissimilar way, players who attended an Academy of a Championship club also explained that when they completed the assignments required of them they typically searched the internet before copying and pasting the relevant information they had found:

6. You don't really learn a lot. It's just sort of 'Go and do it'. You've just got to find it on the internet and text books and that.
  5. It's not really education; it's just like copy and paste.
  6. Copy and paste.
  4. That's what I'm saying, I don't think we are learning from that ... 'cos it is just getting sources off the internet not using your own brains ...
  2. I don't really mind that 'cos this ain't school no more innit? I am done with secondary school, I don't mind just copy and pasting everything, but sometimes it gets really boring. Like him just sitting there.
  1. No, the only thing why it is bothering me 'cos like I thought I was going to learn something through it, but I am not really learning anything. I'm just copy, paste, change words.
- (Year 1, Club 8)

Although it was difficult to determine from the focus group discussions whether players' teachers or tutors were aware of their tendency to copy and paste material from the internet, it was clear that on occasions players were instructed to copy out work verbatim from textbooks and associated material. As one group of players from a League One club put it:

5. Because it's all computer-based, you can either copy out of the textbook ... (Or) they say 'Just copy this page', so you just type it out
  4. [Interrupts] They literally say 'Copy it'.
  2. Or like 'Define these words' or something
  5. [Interrupts] Yeah, and then you just go on Wikipedia and get it ...
  7. Our teacher just writes on the board and we just write in the book and that's our lesson done.
  4. Yeah, he just writes it on the board and we got to copy it.
- (Year 2, Club 3)

Players from a League Two club similarly described how this didactic approach to teaching did not generally help them with their learning and, by their own admission, this often questioned the value of the courses they were following:

3. We just look at a book and just copy stuff.
4. Bit of a joke really. They just give us sheets of paper and we just write whatever is on the paper.

3. All we do is just write for hours ...
  4. You don't learn anything that you do though.
  5. They don't actually teach it they just give you the sheets and you just copy it.
  1. She tells you to read through it but we don't.
- (Year 2, Club 2)

Apart from the boredom which they associated with copying and pasting material for their coursework, the comments expressed by many players suggested that they did not particularly mind doing so, even though they were often well aware that this was not an effective way of learning. This, it might be argued, was partly an expression of the seemingly low value that players associated with their educational development that, as explained earlier, has its roots in their early formative experiences of education (Willis, 2009 [1978]). As the next section indicates, however, it is also likely that the ways in which the players were taught was a consequence of the relational constraints experienced by other members of their dynamic interdependency networks (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom, 1977) who were charged with delivering their educational programmes.

### **Education in professional football: a process of learned helplessness?**

The claimed tendency for players to copy large parts of their work from different sources and gain assistance from their tutors on a regular basis was closely associated with the parallel tendency for players to undergo a process of learned helplessness (Willis, 2009 [1978]) in their studies. In the context of professional football, the findings of this study suggest that because young players were not usually constrained to undertake their work in a relatively independent manner, few of them claimed to derive the benefits that are conventionally associated with the process of academic learning. Many players claimed instead that they were simply required to adhere to the learning styles adopted by their teachers, which often involved them telling players verbally what to write down and copy from a whiteboard at the

front of the classroom. At one Championship club, for example, it was claimed that the teacher would take an active role in telling players what to write before requiring them to copy what was being said verbatim. The players said:

5. (The) teacher (stands) at the front telling us what to say and then telling us to write down something.

7. They will give us the task and they will just leave us for the whole lesson to do the task and that is it.

Q. Leave the class?

5. No, they will just sit down like and they will be there but they won't actually teach us the lesson. They will just tell us what to write ... We don't learn it, we just type. We see something and then we write it down. That is it.

All: Laugh.

5. That is what we do; we don't get taught it.

1. If we were taught it, we would learn it more.

(Year 2, Club 14)

Commenting upon the apparent ways in which they were 'spoon-fed' by their EWO, another group of players from a PL club explained that much of the time they spent on the theoretical components of their educational courses involved them copying material from a board at the front of the classroom housed within the club:

3. Like training, you can be free and like open-minded and you can do what you like ... but here it's not at all the same. Literally, we're told, spoon-fed what we have to do ... Like 'Write what I say on the board, write it word-for-word'.

2. There's quite a lot of copying down like. Like he'll tell us stuff

3. [Interrupts] Like 'Write this off a sheet'. If it's gonna be that case, why don't they just give us the sheet, do you know what I mean?

4. Yeah, a lot of copying off the board.

1. It's not that we're gaining anything, 'cos we're writing it from a second-hand source.

(Year 2, Club 5)

Other PL players who discussed their experiences of being educated at a local sixth-form college similarly recalled how their teachers often told them what to write when completing their assessments:

4. Basically when I am at the college, I get told what to put in my work.

1. It's 'cos you ask.

3. So it is not really like I am learning off my own back. Like if I don't know he will tell me what to put. Some areas I get myself so like I will get out of, but some areas I don't and I just get told.

(Year 2, Club 20)

In view of the strategies teachers often adopted in relation to players' learning, all players felt that it was almost impossible to fail the course they were following, and even if they began to show signs of falling behind with their work, or even failing, they expected to receive the requisite help to pass the course. Indeed, notwithstanding the apathy many players expressed towards the courses they were following and which were grounded in their habitus (Elias, 2001), they rarely feared failing the coursework-based elements of the ASE programme because of the degree of help they received from their tutors. In this regard, many players drew similar conclusions to those of a group of players from a League Two club who said:

3. You can't really fail it. It is like retard proof innit?

2. Because they help you, the teachers help you as much as they can to get you at least a pass, don't they?

1. Yeah, you get your money as well at the end of the day.

5. Even if you fall behind, they just focus on you so they can get you a pass.

(Year 2, Club 12)



Although none of the players felt that they were likely to fail theoretical components of the ASE programme (a point that was reinforced by the informal comments made to the researcher by those responsible for the education of players), they also felt that the courses they were studying had limited academic value and were unlikely to be regarded as highly as A-Levels by those outside of the world of professional football. One group of League One players, for example, said:

- 5. Even if we did get the education there's basically nothing. It's not worth the paper it's written on ...
  - 2. In college I would put more effort in if it was a course that you felt 'Oh this is gonna benefit me'.
  - 5. Challenging, yeah.
  - 2. But you think 'Oh, if I do alright in this course, I take it out and every employer will be like "Ok, you just got that, but it's not really anything"'.  
Q. Why is that?
  - 5. Because you can't get an actual A-Level in what we're doing ... I don't even know what job it would lead to being honest.
  - 3. I'm sure we're doing the short course, not like the proper course.
  - 5. My mum didn't get why I finished so early. She was like 'you should be finishing when everyone else is finishing'.
  - 7. We go to college one and a half days a week and we finish the course in like 4 months.
- (Year 2, Club 3)

To this end, many of the players felt that the BTECs and NVQs that were delivered as part of the ASE programme were unlikely to help them to find 'good' jobs away from football should they fail to gain a professional contract. With reference to the appropriateness of the courses offered to players the findings reported here were similar to those reported by Monk and Olsson (2006) despite changes in education provision since their study was conducted. Notwithstanding a move towards NVQ qualifications, which are seen as more valuable because of their A-Level equivalence, many players felt that the course would be viewed as less credible than other courses because of its focus on sport and because of its vocational

nature, which is often common among other young people (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Roberts, 1996). In line with the findings of Monk and Olsson (2006), if education is to be of use as part of a career away from football, the players who had given some consideration to education or a future career agreed that they needed to gain qualifications that were more recognized within wider society, a process most closely associated with youth's new condition and the de-standardizing of the youth lifestyle (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2011; Roberts, 1996).

It is also worth pointing out that despite some of their concerns about the education courses they were following, and recognition that they did not 'learn much', this concern was always of secondary importance when compared to the concerns players expressed over whether they would gain a professional contract or not. As Parker (1996, p. 142) noted in his study:

Professional football had long since represented an idealized "working" goal and, as such, had occupied a position of key operational importance within their adolescent lives'. Related activities had subsequently been allowed to take precedence over and above a whole range of other issues, one of which was school work.

The lack of concern surrounding the way the ASE was delivered, therefore, reflected a wider lack of motivation many players had towards education, and was a further expression of the importance that was placed upon gaining a professional football contract over and above any concern for a career away from professional football (Parker, 1996; Platts & Smith, 2009). In this regard, success on the pitch was understandably prioritized over success in the classroom at that point in the lives of players.

## **Education as a metaphor for occupational failure**

The counter-education culture that had evidently developed among many of the players during childhood (Roberts, 1996; Willis, 2009 [1978]), and subsequently strengthened upon entrance to their Academy or CoE, was exacerbated by the players' perception that their coaches, managers and EWOs believed that to emphasize education and post-career planning over the investment required for a career in football meant that they were already thinking that they might not 'make it' as a professional. In this regard, the findings of this study confirmed Parker's (1996, p. 145) observation that 'for any player to admit to an affinity for academic attainment or to overtly undertake steps towards post-career planning was, in effect, to admit also to the inevitability of footballing rejection'. In other words, there had developed among players a sub-cultural attitude and acceptance that 'to succeed as a professional one had to "think" as a professional, and that meant "thinking" only of football' (Parker, 1996, p. 145). The cultural expectation among many players to place less emphasis on, or even ignore, their education and planning for a career away from football should they fail to be offered a professional contract was evident in many of the focus groups held with them. Indeed, whilst post-career planning was a fundamental part of the ASE programme, when asked if they discussed their education with their coach or manager, one group of players from a League One club said:

5. Yeah, but you'd never speak to [coach name] or [coach name] or anything about it.  
1. You don't speak to a coach though do ya?  
7. No, not on a regular basis. But when we do, what's it called in the book?  
5. Yeah, but you don't speak about what you are gonna do after do ya? You speak about your progress and what you are gonna do in the future, as in future games and shit.  
Q. Why don't you speak to the coaches?  
3. 'Cos they're sort of concentrating on trying to get you a pro.  
4. 'Cos they think that you are thinking about something else and they'll think 'Oh, maybe he doesn't really want it.  
3. Yeah, they might think you are being negative and stuff.  
(Year 2, Club 10)

Since education and post-career planning was something of a taboo subject among coaches (Monk, 2000; Parker, 1996), any talk of what players might do if they fail to gain a professional contract, or who they thought might be awarded a contract was confined to the dressing room or when doing jobs so that they could be confident that none of the management staff would hear what was being discussed. This was brought out particularly by players at a PL club who described the emphasis their manager placed on football, rather than education, thus:

- 1. To your manager it's sort of, it's more football related innit?
  - 2. More football.
  - 1. There's different people you can talk to for like moral stuff ...
  - 1. Yeah.
  - 2. Your mind's on other things ...
  - 3. It doesn't come up, just like if we're all talking in the changing rooms and that and then you say something like 'What would you do?'
  - 1. 'What would you do if football didn't work out?' Just like what would happen.
  - 3. I mean there's nothing you can do, if, if you're not good enough or you've got an injury. We can't do anything about it.
- (Year 2, Club 18)

Although mention of education and post-career planning was something that was to be avoided in the company of coaches on a day-to-day basis, it was also clear that players were constrained to adopt a similar approach with their EWO even though, in effect, this was the responsibility of the EWO. For many players the EWO represented just another member of the Academy or CoE hierarchy who would frown upon them for not channelling all their energy into football by appearing too concerned with their education. Of particular concern for players was that the contents of any discussions between themselves and their EWO would 'get back' (Chapter Six) to the coach or manager. When asked if they would discuss their education and post-career planning with their EWO, players from a League One club said:

1. No 'cos the focus is on making it now. So there's not a lot going on now about what can I do if I don't make it or when. They focus now on the football.
  - Q. How do you think you would be seen by the coaches or the education officer if you did go to them saying 'What do you think I could do if I don't make it?'
  2. That would get around like, like even if you said like 'Just me and you'. That will always get around.
  3. Yeah, it's not a good thing.
  5. They say 'Oh, it's just between us but ...'
- (Year 2, Club 9)

It was clear, therefore, that the players sought to present an appropriate 'self' (Blumer, 1969) towards the coaches and EWO with regard to the discussions about education or post-career planning. It was clear that despite them expressing concern about the future should they fail to gain a professional contract, this form of conversation was saved for situations where they were 'back-stage', that is, away from the coaches and managers where they were constrained to 'put on a show' (Goffman, 1959). As Goffman (1959, p. 212) notes in his work on impression management:

When there is little chance of being seen, opportunities for relaxation can be taken; when there is little chance of being put to the test, the cold facts can be presented in glowing light and the performers can play their part for all it is worth.

In the company of management personnel, however, players were nevertheless constrained by the thoughts of and actions towards other members of their interconnecting networks (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom, 1977) to avoid conversations regarding education and a future away from football. Thus, whilst players seemed more comfortable discussing education among themselves, in relation to their coaches and EWO, players were in constant dialogue

with themselves about whether ‘to display or not to display; to tell or not to tell; to let on or not to let on; to lie or not to lie; and in each case, to whom, how, when and where’ (Goffman, 1963, p. 42).

But how do the players form the view that education is of secondary importance when compared to physical training and the matches they compete in? And how do they form the opinion that, for their coaches and managers, education is not an important means by which they will be judged when decisions are made with respect to them being awarded professional contracts? As Cushion and Jones (2006, p. 150) note in relation to their research on the coach-athlete relationship in Academy football, the fact that ‘domination was consistent and almost omnipresent ensured that a process of inculcation, or habitus, occurred’, and this is one way in which players come to describe their experiences with education. As noted in Chapter Four, the players’ existence in an environment characterized by rather unequal power relations between themselves and the management of the Academy or CoE meant that the actions of the managers and coaches helped in ‘reproducing an arbitrary culture but also the power structures reflecting the interests of a dominant group’ (Cushion & Jones, 2006, p. 150), whereas the needs and wants of the lower group were largely marginalized by their power inferiority (Elias, 1978). With respect to education not only did managers and coaches express the view that education plays very little role in helping players gain a professional contract, at times they believed that it actually undermined this. To this end, the position taken by many managers and coaches in relation to the usefulness of education provisions, together with the relatively powerful position they occupy, encouraged players to express a similar attitude whether they were in full agreement or not.

### **Club management on education**

Almost immediately upon commencing their scholarship or apprenticeship, many players began to appreciate that, in the main, their coaches and managers not surprisingly regarded education as being less important than their football development. By prioritizing football concerns over education in almost all aspects of their work, coaches and managers were in effect constraining players further toward developing an irreverent attitude to education and reinforce many of their second nature tendencies (Elias, 2001) to see it as being of little value to them at this stage of their careers (Willis, 2009 [1978]). As Cushion and Jones (2006, p. 152) observed in their study:

Occupying the space of a “good player” was seen to depend on an individual’s acceptance of a habitus similar to that established by the coaches. Such an acceptance was viewed by the coaches as legitimate and valued behaviour, and was suitably rewarded by their attitudes towards those players as well as by their perception of those players’ chances of “making it” [as professional soccer players].

Whilst the ways in which coaches and managers expressed their opinions of education varied between clubs, all players felt that had it not been for the compulsory nature of the education they were doing, it would be something that the clubs, and the coaches and managers therein, would not choose to deliver. This view, which reflected players’ thoughts that many clubs were not particularly concerned about their education, was revealed by players from clubs throughout the leagues. The comments of one group of players from a PL club were indicative of the ways in which they felt the way education was viewed by their club corresponded with their own thoughts on the benefits of their educational courses:

2. It's not up to him [coach] ... it's obviously the FA says we have to do it, but I think if it was left to [club name] they wouldn't have us doing it 'cos we're ... brought out of school and things so they don't care about education really ...
  3. But even if I fell out of football I wouldn't use this [education].
  4. Some people don't make it in football and have got nothing else to do. Like, if you get a contract early you just don't give a crap about your school work do ya?
- (Year 1, Club 5)

Similarly, when discussing the education they undertake and their opinions of the views of education held by other people at their club, players from a League Two club described the general lack of interest from their coaches and managers as follows:

1. I would rather not have the money though than go to college for two years.
  6. Doesn't seem worth it does it?
  2. Not worth it.
- Q. How do you think the club, and your coaches see your education and college?
3. They say that it is [important] but they don't really talk about it.
  6. Yeah, they don't really talk to us about it, they just say 'Oh make sure you get your college work done because what are you going to do if you don't get a pro?'. But that is about as far as it goes.
- (Year 2, Club 12)

Insofar as coaches and managers were thought to be 'interested' in players' education this was typically when they sought to assert their authority over players and instil discipline among them if they failed to keep up-to-date with their work, or if they behaved poorly. Reflecting upon the ways in which club management frequently exerted greater social control over those players, one group of players from a Championship club said:

3. They're not interested.
  2. Only when they're telling us off ...
  5. They're only interested if you don't do it [education].
  2. They're bothered about how you behave.
  3. Yeah, that's it. They're not bothered how well you're doing ... if you do something wrong in college they'll pick up on it.
- (Year 2, Club 13)



In this respect, poor behaviour and lack of progress with their studies meant players were frequently threatened with a variety of punishments, like they were if they failed to complete the jobs they were required to complete around the club (Chapter Four). In fact, the proposed punishments for players misbehaving during education or falling behind with their work were, in most cases, greater than those relating to their non-completion of jobs, and included not being allowed to train or play matches. These threats were not actually very frequently carried out for the players, but misbehaving or not completing their work was a risk that was not usually worth taking. This view was expressed by players at a League One club who revealed the actions of club management in the following way:

- 2. They are always nagging on at us to do stuff, like do our work and all stuff like that.
  - 7. We get punished as well if we don't do it.
  - 2. Yeah, if we don't do it, we can't play.
  - 4. Yeah.
  - 7. If you don't turn up to college, or you mess around at college, then you're not involved on Saturdays.
- (Year 1, Club 10)

On the face of it, then, the supposed punishments administered by coaches and managers to players was perhaps one indicator that those in management roles do indeed take a greater interest in their education than they had first imagined. For players, however, there was a rather different, and pragmatic, reason for the coaches' and managers' interest in their behaviour and progress in education. Several groups of players claimed that the coaches and managers at their clubs were more interested in them completing the educational component of the ASE programme, rather than the level of their achievement. This point was neatly summarized by one group of League Two players who described their coaches' opinion of education thus:

2. I think they like us to get it done. We've got to get it done 'cos the club get's some money for every person who passes and finishes all their [ASE].
  4. Think [name of coach] just says 'Yeah, get it done'.
  2. But when it comes down to it, they are just ... for the football int' he [coach] really? He just makes sure we get that done.
  3. Just makes sure we get there.
- (Year 2, Club 6)

This view was reinforced by the following group of players from a PL club who claimed that their view of the situation was that most of their coaches and managers gave the impression that they simply wanted the players to complete their education regardless of what process of learning occurred:

6. Most of them.
  5. It's all about just getting it complete isn't it. They're not arsed if you learn anything
  3. They're not bothered about teaching ya, they wanna just get the work out of ya.
- Q. Why's that do you reckon?
3. 'Cos they know we're not motivated to do it, we don't wanna learn.
  5. Yeah.
- (Year 2, Club 11)

In addition, players claimed that much of the concern among coaches was related to the need for clubs to access the funding they receive when a player passes the ASE. Indeed, for the clubs who were in a less financially secure position, the monies they received from players completing their education may determine the budget they had available for their Academy or CoE in the following season. Not surprisingly, therefore, there were a number of instances where players expressed the view that it was important for them to complete their education in order to help the club with funding, as in the following extract taken from a focus group held with players from a League One club who described how their coaches and managers thought of the education they undertake:

5. They think it's really important but like the thing we are doing
  7. [Interrupts] The thing is, it's important because we are funded by the LFE, so it's important because they say to us if we don't pass it
  3. [Interrupts] We get £500 if we pass the course.
  7. And if we pass they like pass as well; the club get like their funding.
  5. For everyone that fails, it's a bad. Like they say it's a black mark on the club. So it's obviously important for the club that we all pass.
- (Year 2, Club 3)

From the players' perspective, therefore, the approach taken by coaches and managers towards education was one driven by the outcome (e.g. completion of the programme) rather than the process of developing them academically. In that regard, it was unsurprising that many of the players reached the conclusion that club management did not value their education and recognized the tokenism it was often afforded. This was mentioned, in particular, by players who were of the opinion that they felt the money some clubs received for players completing their ASE was the main reason managers and coaches were interested in their educational progress. In that regard, despite managers and coaches employing the same authoritarian approach to dealing with players who were not up-to-date with their education, the need to be seen as a player who reflected the ideals of the managers and coaches helps us to understand why, in the context of a professional football, Academy or CoE players were reluctant to show an interest in education, preferring instead to manage the impressions they were presenting to those around them. As Parker (1996, p. 133) notes, one of the explanations for such developments is 'the cultural kudos attached to professional football as a career has often led young recruits to accept notions of sporting grandeur over and above less attractive and more probable career outcomes'. Many of the players were aware of the slim chance they had at reaching the professional level of the game, and the difficulty they had of turning that into a career. What was central to their views on education, however, which was fostered by the opinions of important members of the figurations to which young players belonged was a lack of appreciation of how doing well in the academic

aspects of their ASE could assist them in becoming a professional footballer, or preparing them for an alternative vocational career.

### **Education as a “back-up plan”**

Notwithstanding the often critical and negative remarks players offered in relation to their education at Academies and CoE, they openly acknowledged that it did play a part in forming a support package should they be unsuccessful in gaining a professional contract. Indeed, whilst their main priority was ‘making it’ as a footballer, many players were willing (if reluctant) to accept the need for a ‘back-up plan’ because few of them would be successful in gaining a full-time career out of the game. This having been said, whilst players were open about how useful a back-up plan might be in the future, they were equally as open about the fact that they paid little attention to investing effort in that back-up plan, which in effect symbolized failure as a footballer. Nevertheless, when asked about future plans, many of the players were open about how hard they felt it was to gain a professional contract and the various decisions taken by the coach or manager who has the job of awarding professional contracts. These points were nicely summarized by the following group of League One players who explained that having a back-up plan was important as follows:

6. No I think [coach] and that, they do look out for us as well, because he says to us like most week, ‘Not everyone’s gonna make it’, so you got to have something to fall back on and at the moment that’s the only thing on offer to fall back on.
  5. He says it like after training to the general group.
  2. He says it to all of us ...
  6. Which is true really.
  3. Because I think really we all have got a good chance of getting a pro and if we all work hard for the rest of the season I think we’ve all got a good chance and I don’t think it will be down to us not doing so well if we didn’t get one.
- (Year 2, Club 3)

As part of this back-up plan, many players, in contrast to the intentions of PLL and the LFE, were of the opinion that the education they were undertaking formed a central part of that back-up plan. When questioned about why they undertook their education programme, just one group of players noted that it helped them learn about areas they need to improve on to be a professional. The majority of players pointed to the ASE programme as being primarily useful if they were required to find an alternative career. For example, when asked about their view of education, one group of Championship players replied:

- 7. Because it is part of our apprenticeship.
  - 3. It's what we get told to do.
  - 6. I'd rather just give them back the £400 that they give us and just don't do it.
  - 4. Yeah but the thing is, I'd wanna do it anyway just in case it doesn't work out here, because you have got to have something to back you up, you can't just have no qualifications 'cos we ain't doing A-Levels are we? We just come here to do football and then when we leave all we have got is GCSEs.
- (Year 2, Club 8)

When asked how the qualifications would help them for the future, players were rather less certain of their answers. Some players, for example, admitted that if they were unable to develop a career in professional football, they would use the qualifications to go to university, as noted by this group of players from the Championship:

- 5. In case your football don't work out.
  - 1. In case you don't make it.
  - 6. At least you've got a little bit of something that you can go to university.
  - 5. At least you've got two little A-Levels, two little diploma things.
- (Year 2, Club 13)

Players from another Championship club discussed their intention to go to university should they be required to as follows:

3. Well I knew that not everybody makes it at football so, I was happy with the course 'cos like if my football don't work out then it'll be like something to back me up like I got a few qualifications.

4. I thought it was good that they said like a lot of people from the course from the clubs, if they don't get a contract they end up going to Loughborough to do a course there.

Q. Is that something that you think about, life after football?

3. Yeah, obviously I think about what if it doesn't work out, and what else am I gonna do, but I try to stay positive and hope I get a pro contract, but keep my options open in case I don't.

Q. What about anybody else? Have you thought about what you might do?

1. No.

4. Yeah, I don't tend to think about it too much, but before I knew if I was getting a scholarship and it was thinking of going down the sport scientist kind of route, so I would like to go back to that if it don't work out.

(Year 2, Club 14)

The references made by a number of players regarding going to university is one area that sets the findings of this study apart from those of other studies in this area. As noted in Chapter One, one part of 'youth's new condition' (Roberts, 1996) has been the expansion of higher education and how 'increasing numbers of young people make "slow-track transitions" through longer-term participation in higher and further education' (MacDonald, 2011, p. 430) as a result. Similarly, while the transitions young people undertake have become increasingly complex (Geldens *et al.*, 2011; Roberts, 1996), there has also been a growing recognition of the importance of educational qualifications to young people's life chances (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Roberts, 1996). These processes, it seems, were not lost on the young players in this study, who did recognize and value the importance of obtaining educational qualifications to facilitate the development of their future careers should they not gain a professional contract, which were notably different to the comments of the young players in Parker's (1996) study.

It was well documented in the study conducted by Parker (1996, p. 160) that players were “‘given stick”, about being “schoolboys” and “boffs” by coaches and players alike, on account of their ambitious educational interests’, which would suggest any talk of going to university would be stifled in a focus group environment. However, perhaps reflecting the expansion of higher education over the past ten years or so, and the growing significance placed on qualifications within society more generally (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Roberts, 1996), some players spoke freely about their desire to go to university as an alternative option to a career in professional football. Whilst it is hard to quantify if this means more players want to go to university as a back-up than was the case in Parker’s study, what is clear is that the handful of players who did think about university were less constrained to talk about it in front of other players as they perhaps were in the past. This may or may not reflect the emergence of a process towards greater tolerance of educational aspirations within Academies and CoE, but the players in this study seemed more open-minded regarding their possible re-engagement in education in the future and their participation in higher education. In that respect, the players in this study appeared to have fallen into one of three distinct groups, which, one suspects, was not present in the players examined by Parker (1996). Firstly, there was a group of players, similar to those in Parker’s study, who did not value education and would not conceive a time in the future where they would require educational qualifications to pursue their chosen career path. Secondly, there was also a small group of players who were partially interested in education and who claimed they would contemplate further or higher education should they fail to gain a professional contract. Finally, there were some players who, despite not showing this to coaches or managers, valued education and would have entered further and higher education had it not been for undertaking a scholarship or apprenticeship, and who spoke ‘back-stage’ (Goffman, 1959) about their plans for attending a university if they did not ‘make it’ in professional football.

Beyond discussing their aspirations to go to university or not, there were a small group of players who thought that the coaching awards on the ASE were worthwhile because they gave them an option to remain in football in a different capacity, should they not ‘make the grade’. Some players felt that undertaking the ASE opened up avenues to play football in the United States of America (USA), for example, upon completion of their scholarship or apprenticeship, either to go and coach or to gain a scholarship at a university. In relation to coaching and playing in the USA, the following group of players were asked about the education they receive and responded:

- 4. Just in case you have got something to fall back on.
  - 6. It is important, just in case you don’t make it because you get coaching badges out of it ...
  - 2. You have got to haven’t you. I thought about it the other day.
  - 4. Not all of us are going to make it.
  - 7. You have got to have something to fall back on haven’t you.
  - Q. What happens if you don’t get taken on?
  - 7. They will give us a scholarship in America, to play football and go to university there if you want to and then I don’t know what else you can do.
  - 6. They can give us funding of up to 50% for whatever we want to do for our career. They pay 50% towards it.
- (Year 2, Club 1)

For most players, however, the preference was for them to attend exit trials or find another club at which they could obtain a trial, for being a player was arguably the central component of their ‘I-’ identity (Dunning, 1999; Elias, 2001). One group of players from a Championship club, for example, explained that if they were not successful in gaining a professional contract they would:

- 6. Go out to the U.S.
- 3. Went to America last year.
- 2. I don’t think that’s.



- 4. It's not the end of your career though.
  - 5. You've got to go to exit trials.
  - 2. Go to another club.
  - 4. It's only one day it's worth going to.
  - 2. Go to lower league club 'cos you get to remember now [club name] are in Championship so it in't as easy to get a contract.
- (Year 2, Club 13)

Similarly, a group of League One players, when asked what they might do if they do not make it as a professional player, also noted a number of other options before claiming they would try other clubs first:

- 4. Don't know.
  - 1. Take a uni course.
  - 5. I'll just keep going down the sport route ...
  - 7. Try another few clubs.
  - 4. I don't know.
  - 8. Yes, definitely try and see if you can get a trial at another club.
- (Year 1, Club 10)

Other players, as in the following extract taken from a focus group held at a Championship club, noted that they did not want to think about the future, preferring to focus on their football career:

- 6, I probably just get a job.
  - 4. Yeah, Policeman.
  - 3. Yeah, I'd be like a bricky, I always said that when I was younger, I'd be a bricky.
- All. Laugh
- Q. Why haven't you thought about it?
- 3. I don't know; you don't wanna think about it.
  - 1. Because you don't wanna think about it.
  - 6. Because you see all your friends and that doing it and like
  - 7. [Interrupts] Yeah, that seems so long.
- (Year 1, Club 17)

Avoiding thinking about the future, and especially a future away from football, was seen by other players as a negative thing to do and something they were not willing to deal with until they had been released and it became a necessity. Players from a League One club, for example, said:

- 1. Don't want to think about it do you?
  - 6. Just concentrating on this.
  - 5. I want to be positive and concentrate on football.
  - 1. Got another year left.
  - Q. At what point will you start thinking about it?
  - 7. Probably when you get released!
  - 1. Probably this time next year.
  - 6. It will be there because you will be under pressure when the manager is watching you.
- (Year 1, Club 1)

The views players expressed regarding their future were similar to the opinions they expressed in relation to their education. Even the players who had considered the future, to do so in detail was almost to give up on the chances of becoming a professional footballer and, like education, post-career planning or contingency plans were not something that should be discussed (Parker, 1996) for fear of it being considered as a metaphor for failure in football (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006). In some respects, contingency plans were even more traumatic for players to consider than education because it constrained them to think about a future without football and when they have failed in pursuit of the ambition that has dominated their lives for many years (Platts & Smith, 2009). On a number of occasions, when questions surrounding contingency plans were raised in the focus groups, players would joke that their alternative job would be as a porn star, the presenter of Match of the Day, and the next Hugh Hefner, rather than consider sensibly the implications of not gaining a professional contract. Among the players in the study, there was a cultural belief that in order to maximize

their chances of gaining a professional contract, they needed to focus on football and nothing else. There was no way they could consider post-career planning and retain enough focus on football, as is expressed by the following extract from a focus group with players at a League Two club:

5. I want to be a teacher.
  2. I want to be an entrepreneur part-time and a full-time professional footballer ...
  1. In the Premiership.
  2. My goal is, by the time I am 26, to get a move to a big club and that is it.
  5. Family and kids.
  4. I haven't really thought about it ... I just think you are more bothered about what is now. Don't really care about the future.
  5. With football, especially here, you get a year contract or two years, so you can't really think much ahead of that, because you just need to focus on doing well in that year so you keep going. It is the same in the other clubs in the lower leagues, because you don't get the four, five year deals.
- (Year 2, Club 2)

Whilst preparing for the future does form some part of the education players undertake, the reality is that they are more focused on their present circumstances than what they might do if they fail to gain a professional contract. During their time of being particularly focused on professional football, players are socialized into an environment where planning for a life away from football is considered to be a negative view on their aspirations of footballing success. This, despite openly admitting that only a few of them are likely to 'make it', and being reminded at certain points of the fragility of their circumstances, they were more-or-less constrained to limit the time spent considering what might happen should they be released. This was expressed by all the groups within the study who believed that throughout their two years, they never engaged fully with the process of post-career planning. The following group of League Two players said:

2. Maybe it is a bit more this year because you haven't got as long left have you.
  5. I think it has been a bit more this year.
  1. You've got to be thinking an' all what you are gonna do. Because we an't had to think about anything what we are gonna do like. If you were at school you have to think what courses to tek and things ...
  2. Because hopefully you want to make it don't you, you think that you gotta think that.
  4. You don't want to focus on it.
  5. If you do well all the time, people just think there is something about him, so you are thinking I've still got a chance while I'm here.
- (Year 2, Club 6)

For other players, including those in the following group from League One, any ideas about what they might do after football was put to the back of their minds because it was not their immediate priority:

3. You got to have it in the back of your mind but you don't want to think about it ...
  4. Because your first priority is to get a pro. That's the first thing you want to do.
  6. You try not to consider you not getting one so you can put everything into. 'Cos if you start thinking about 'Oh, I've got to sort something out for it in case I get released in three months', you got your priorities.
  7. And if you don't get one here then you just got to go and find somewhere else where they do want to give you one.
  6. Yeah, that's the thing. There are a lot of clubs around that you can sort of try.
- (Year 2, Club 3)

Their view was similar to another group of players who explained that they had not considered what they would do after football, primarily because of the focus that was required to be a full-time player:

5. Never thought what I'd be if I didn't do football ... I've never really thought about it, I never really dwell on the fact 'Oh, what if football doesn't work out?' I know there is a possibility that it's not gonna work out, I just never really thought ...
  2. I don't know how many have thought about doing this and that, like 'cos you don't think about it if your minds set on doing something.
  1. Yeah, when you're a scholar and you're in full-time like we are, like you don't have time to be thinking about anything else 'cos it's full-time.
- (Year 2, Club 9)

Finally, when asked about post-career planning, players were often distressed at having to think about the possibility that they might not become a professional footballer. The rewards and prestige they associated with becoming a professional, the sacrifices they have made, and the socialization they have undergone during their time as a player led them to avoid thinking about what life would be like if they were not a professional player, as the following group of players from a Championship club highlighted:

1. 'Cos there isn't life without a club.
  3. My life would stop I think.
  - Q. Do you think about not getting a pro contract then?
  5. No, if I think about not getting a pro contract here.
  7. That's negative energy, we don't need that negative energy here.
  1. Hurts my head.
  - Q. But in all seriousness, I know we said this earlier, but in 6 months time there is a chance you might not get a pro contract.
  2. Shhh
  6. This kid's dealing out some truths, getting me scared ...
  - Q. Do you ever discuss it amongst yourselves?
  2. Nah.
  4. Not really.
  1. Maybe in little conversations but it won't be deep.
  7. We don't like it, we don't like touching on it.
  4. We don't like talking about it.
  2. We spoke about it to that American kid, what's his name?
  7. Oh yeah, but we don't really like him do we.
- (Year 2, Club 8)

## Summary

Players' views on the educational programmes they followed and the process of education more generally were characterized by a number of well-understood, shared meanings that can only be adequately understood if and when we locate them within the networks of relationships (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom, 1977) characteristic of their lives more broadly; in particular, those in which they find themselves within their clubs. This is important not least because some appreciation of the significance of players' more central interdependencies in

clubs, and their personal biographies and dispositions towards, or away from, education may help us to explain how they come to view and experience the educational programmes they followed. Indeed, as Parker (1996) has noted previously, during their time undertaking an apprenticeship or scholarship, players usually fail to see beyond their guaranteed two-year period as a youth player, and the impact of education provisions appear negligible. They are also highly unlikely to bring about significant change in the deep-seated preferences for playing football over educational attainment, which forms a crucial component of players' personality structures, or habitus of players and others within their interdependency networks (Dunning, 2002; Elias, 1978, 2001). As the next chapter indicates, a similar conclusion may be arrived at when considering other aspects of players' experiences in clubs.

## Chapter Six

### **‘Bottom of the Pile’: Player Welfare in Professional Football Academies and Centres of Excellence**

#### **Introduction**

The previous two chapters have sought to shed light on some aspects of the deeply entrenched sub-culture that exists within professional football and how this comes to impact on the views and experiences players at Academies and CoE have of the educational courses they undertake as part of the ASE programme. The education of young players and their preparation for alternative careers should they not ‘make it’ in the game, however, are just two welfare-related issues that are purported to be the responsibility of clubs charged with safeguarding the well-being of young players. The objective of this chapter is to explore the views and experiences players had of other aspects of club life that impacts on their welfare. In particular, the chapter seeks to highlight how the consequences of the culture of football outlined in Chapter Four, and players’ desire to gain a professional contract, was typically manifest in scenarios that are potentially harmful to their welfare and compound the experiences they recalled in relation to the educational component of the ASE programme.

#### **Young players as ‘bottom of the pile’ in clubs**

The unique culture that exists within professional football is a complex one that, as Chapter Four made clear, had a number of ramifications for players attending Academies and CoE. Of particular significance for the welfare of players, however, was the tendency for them to be regarded by others within the club as somehow inferior and as occupying relatively marginal

roles therein. Principally, this view was emanated from the actions of coaches, managers and professionals at clubs and resulted in all of the players in this study drawing similar conclusions about the ways in which they were viewed and treated by others at their respective clubs. When asked about this, one group of players at a PL club said:

1. Probably at the bottom like, bottom of the ladder.
  2. We get the blame for everything.
  3. We have to go across and collect the first team's gear in after the training so. I don't know it's just
  4. [Interrupts] Like anything the first team do, we get the blame. If they leave a drink out, we have to pick it up.
  1. That's for everyone though, like everyone goes up through it.
  3. I know it's hard and that like, but the first team don't win every game. We've been successful over the last couple of years; we still get caned don't we?
  1. Still get the piss taken out of us.
- (Year 2, Club 18)

This view, which was frequently articulated by players from all clubs in the study, often resulted in the players internalizing a perception of themselves as a 'minority of the worst' (Elias & Scotson, 1994) and as occupying the least powerful, and respected, position in the hierarchy of their club. Indeed, many of the players repeatedly used phrases like 'bottom of the ladder' or 'bottom of the food chain' when describing how they were perceived by others. To express the rather unequal power differentials that existed between themselves and other members of the club, players often emphasized the lack of respect they were afforded by club management. One particularly good example of that can be seen in the following extract taken from a focus group held with players at a Championship club:

5. Everything they ask you to do ... you have to do it.
8. You get your food last.
1. We're not anymore though boys, we are second years!
4. Yeah, the first years are bottom of the food chain.



7. You just get told to do everything, like if boxes need moving you have go and move them.
  2. Yeah, like, silly things, instead of drinking the bottle and bringing it in, they [professional players] will just drop it and leave it and you have to go out and pick it up.
  4. Just so you have got to run.
- (Year 2, Club 8)

A similar situation was described by players at a League Two club who pointed to the ways in which they felt unwanted and not valued by others at the club:

1. It's like ... have you seen that movie where the man goes to the girl? 'I'm big you're small, I'm right you're wrong. There's nothing you can do about it'
  2. Matilda.
  1. Matilda, that's what it's like ...
  5. Sometimes we feel like we're not valued.
  2. Absolute dirt.
  5. We feel like dirt, but we do it just to keep a bit of cash in our pockets. I think it's a selfish act.
  2. Yeah, like maybe at Prem clubs they don't get treated as bad because they can pay for like extra coaches and stuff like that, but, here, because we are lacking money and stuff, it's just like as soon as we came here I bet they thought 'Oh, here come the servants' or something like that. Just to do all our work that we don't wanna pay for.
- (Year 1, Club 21)

It was also apparent from the responses of many players that whilst they felt particularly frustrated at being treated poorly by significant others, they were nevertheless more-or-less constrained to accept their 'fate' and 'save face' (Goffman, 1959) by not questioning the actions of others. Indeed, although young players were often the ones who were the butt of practical jokes because of their relatively low position in clubs, they learnt to greet such circumstances in a dismissive way, which often included going along with the joke, or by not reacting at all. As the comments of the following group of players from a PL club highlight,

reacting in other ways often increased the unwanted attention that came to be placed upon them:

4. Someone picked him up, put him in the laundry basket, and then turned all the showers on.
  5. Like anything, like people like hide your stuff and that. You just got to not say anything, just laugh it off and that.
  - Q. Why have you not got to say anything?
  5. Because they'll do it every time to you.
  1. Just take it as a laugh then.
  3. Take it on the chin.
  1. But if you bite back they'll just keep doing it and that.
- (Year 1, Club 18)

Tolerating the treatment they received from the coaches and professionals was viewed as a *rite de passage* by players who learnt, upon entering an Academy or CoE, that central to surviving in this particular workplace was accepting the fact that being the subject of practical jokes (which may be humiliating on occasions) would help build character in the long-term (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006). That players had internalized socially, and psychologically, the view that they must show respect to professional players by accepting the 'banter' which characterizes the game, was expressed by players from a League One club:

7. They just prove a point that we gotta respect them ...
  5. Because we are the youth team.
  4. They've gone through hard work, like we have, to get to where they are so I think we have got to go through that as well ...
  8. You just get used to it.
  7. Yeah, I don't really mind it now.
  4. It's a bit of banter though innit?
  1. I don't really mind because I think I would do the same if I was a pro.
  7. Yeah, it's just banter really.
- (Year 1, Club 10)

Another group of players from a PL club recalled how they were similarly expected to ‘take’ the ‘banter’ that is commonplace in professional football, but which often contains a more serious and well understood meaning (Roderick, 2006), as follows:

1. We have to, it’s like we have to work our way up. We’re at the bottom. We have to do jobs and that ...
  5. That’s the thing in football clubs like, people batter you all the time and you just got to take it like as a joke. You can’t take it seriously.
  3. Like last season I used to go crazy ... didn’t I?
  - Q. What happens if people don’t take it?
  2. Aye, you’ll crumble like.
  3. If you answer back then you are gonna be in even more shit aren’t you? If you answer back to the first team like.
  2. You need to show it doesn’t affect you.
  3. Once they know you’re biting they’ll just keep doing it to you. Like last year I used to get caned all the time for biting and that so I don’t do it this season.
- (Year 2, Club 18)

In this regard, it was clear that among players there existed a feeling of recognition that unless they were prepared to avoid ‘answering back’, and be accepting of the practical jokes and other everyday banter to which they were routinely subject, it would be almost impossible to survive in the game. In that respect, as Roderick (2006, p. 72) has noted in relation to perceptions of injury:

banter among players is commonplace and appears in many places to be double-edged. It seems important to understand that despite being couched in humorous and seemingly harmless terms, each joke contains a more serious implicit but general meaning.

Although the use of banter in Academies and CoE was less-orientated towards the management of injury, it was no less prominent and was still underpinned by serious sub-texts. In particular, the banter with which many young players had to deal, was delivered by the professional players at their clubs, and was deployed in ways that reinforced the perception that young players were ‘bottom of the club’ and had ‘not yet made it’. This is by no means an unusual, for banter, or ‘teasing, it often seems, is an informal initiation device employed by a team to train and test the capacity of its new members to “take a joke”, that is, to sustain a friendly manner while perhaps not feeling it’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 211). In this respect, professional players at clubs often tested the younger players for their resistance to such ‘micky-taking’ whilst, simultaneously, the young players in Academies and CoE viewed being able to ‘take’ banter as a form of *rite de passage* which they must accept if they were going to make it in the professional game. As Collinson (1988, p. 187) has noted, banter is often conceived as a ‘social “survival of the fittest”’ with the ‘underlying principle behind the pressure to be able to give and take a joke, to laugh at oneself and expect others to respond likewise to cutting remarks’. This was how the players in this study conceptualized banter and, as a result, their comments were indicative of the fact that ‘actual affective response must be concealed and an appropriate affective response must be displayed’ (Goffman, 1959, p. 211) at all times. In theoretical terms the professionals at clubs were perceived as the more established ‘group’ not only because of their shared history (Elias & Scotson, 1994) but also because of their shared goals that help construct their ‘we’-identity (Elias, 2001). In this regard, the use of banter, and imposition of what Elias calls ‘blame gossip’ (Elias & Scotson, 1994), helped the professional players protect, maintain and advance their own position relative to the younger players. In this respect, the test with which young players were faced was also underpinned by attempts from professional players to undermine their position and shame them in front of other people. As Wouters (2011, p. 156) notes, ‘shaming is a form of

external control exercised mainly to prevent people from engaging with opportunities to go against the codes' and, in Academies and CoE, it was employed by adult coaches, managers and professional players in equal measure to help maintain the power imbalances that characterize their relationships with younger players (van Krieken, 1998; Wouters, 2007, 2011).

It is important to note, however, that despite the connotations it had for their position relative to those around them, players were more appreciative of situations where they felt able to 'throw' and 'take' banter, which occurred occasionally with coaches and managers. As noted in Chapter Five, as part of a wider process of informalization whereby the relations between adults and young people have become less hierarchical over time, power balances have narrowed, and resulted in a gradual social equalization (Kilminster, 1998; van Krieken, 1998), players appeared to appreciate informal settings and there existed a repeated 'quest for spontaneous, authentic, relaxed and informal conduct' (Wouters, 2011, p. 149). Finding such a situation, however, was very difficult within an Academy or CoE, apart from when players were away from adult staff members and this facilitated their pursuit of it in an educational setting (Chapter Five). In the context of an Academy or CoE, players could not be sure whether banter would be well received by coaches or managers, and had to wait to see if staff instigated such action before they felt able to join in.

Whilst contact with professional players was typically sporadic and confined to specific times, such as during training or at the training ground, players' 'focused encounters' (Goffman, 1963) with them were often characterized by a perceived lack of respect by many professional players who were said to treat younger players like 'shit'. When discussing their

encounters and relationships with professional players at their club, one group of League Two players, for example, said:

1. They treat us like shit really.

3. Yes, they do to be fair.

1. To be fair they just see us blatantly there picking stuff up and they will just throw the dirty stuff that they have had their shitty arses in and balls in and stuff.

Q. Who is this, the first team?

1. Yes, they just drop stuff on the floor and we have to pick it up on the match-day.

Q. Do you have any contact with the first team other than in these situations?

4. Yeah

1. Most of them are pretty nice to be fair.

3. They are sound. They still treat us like shit sometimes though.

1. Because they have been there and done it.

(Year 2, Club 2)

Other players similarly drew attention to the ways in which they were often expected to service the needs of professional players by undertaking menial tasks such as picking up bottles and kit. For example, despite being asked to join in with the first team squad for training purposes, once training had been completed players from a PL club described the expectations of them as follows:

3. Like it's just like we get looked down on and that a bit. As if like, 'Oh, they're the apprentices' or whatever 'So we can just treat them like shit'.

5. At the end of the session we have to get all the gear and stuff and all the others just walk in.

4. They just leave bottles everywhere.

5. Bottles everywhere and we've got to pick 'em all up for 'em.

Q. Is this your gear or the first team's gear?

5. Both.

7. We don't have to pick their stuff up.

4. We do, you do. If you train with them, if you go over there they'll walk in and leave like the boots out and that and you have to carry them in.

(Year 2, Club 11)

In another example, players from a League One club explained that whilst, in their eyes, some professionals ‘respected’ them, the majority typically sought to emphasize the status differentials (Elias & Scotson, 1994) between them and the younger players by requiring them to make cups of tea, or leave the changing room. The players said:

7. Some of them have respect for us, but some of them think they can just give you this and that and treat you like shit.

Q. What do you mean?

4. Like just telling you what to do and that.

7. Like to get out of the changing rooms, and start giving you shit and trying to be funny all the time.

6. Like if you make yourself a cup of tea or something they will say something about that.

(Year 2, Club 1)

Finally, it was clear that the claimed differences between the ways in which professionals and young players were viewed in clubs was also expressed partially by the things the professionals *did not* do; namely, trying, wherever possible, to distance themselves from the young players. The view expressed by many players was that professionals often thought they were ‘too good’ to be mixing with them, and saw themselves as occupying a significantly higher position of power in the status hierarchy of professional football. This was neatly illustrated in the comments of players at a club in the Championship, who said of the professionals’ attitude towards younger players there:

4. They are rude, trust me. All I said was ‘You move the goals there and I’ll do this’ and he was like, ‘Go do the goals you twat’.

Q. Is that something that has happened before?

3. Well, he’s club captain.

Q. What happens in terms of your relationship with the first team? Do you mix with them a lot or?

2. There’s a few.

4. The younger ones.

2. And there are a few that we mix, like we talk to.
  - Q. And what are they like?
  5. Some of them are alright, but some of them just don't want anything to do with us.
  4. Like we were playing table tennis with some of them.
  2. We were playing table tennis with some of them yesterday, but there are some of them who just think that they are so like too
  4. [Interrupts] Too good to mix with us.
  2. Yeah, too good to mix with us like.
- (Year 1, Club 8)

For the players, accommodating the idea that they are not in the thoughts of a large number of the professionals is often hard to accept, especially because, for them, the professionals represent someone they admired, even if it is only because they have 'made it'. For the professional players, however, because they themselves have been through the same process they typically understand the role of the young players as being about, among other things, undertaking jobs, making-up numbers in training and reserve games, and remaining as anonymous as possible until they are awarded a professional contract. Intentionally and unintentionally, the attitude of the professional players reinforced the power differentials that existed between themselves and the younger players, in favour of generally more integrated and cohesive adult members of the club.

### **Coaches, managers and player welfare: verbal forms of social control**

As significant as the relationship players developed with professionals at their respective clubs were, arguably more important in terms of the welfare of young players were the relationships they form with coaches and managers, not least because of the amount of time players spend with club management and because they are heavily dependent upon them to secure a professional contract. That coaches and managers played a significant role in determining future contract decisions in professional football meant that players were often apprehensive of disappointing, or displeasing, them for fear that it will reflect badly upon



them when it comes to deciding who should be awarded a professional contract. In this regard, players adopt seemingly less powerful positions within the figurations that constitute professional football, especially within their own clubs to determine that course of their careers (Kelly & Waddington, 2006; Roderick, 2006) and were repeatedly required to engage in regular ‘face work’ (Goffman, 1959) to keep their coaches and managers onside.

One of the main ways in which the coaches and managers exercised their power over players and sought to control their behaviours was through a variety of verbal forms of social control. When explaining aspects of the culture of the game to which they were routinely subject in Chapter Five, it was noted how swearing, in particular, was a prominent technique employed by coaches and managers before, during and after matches. Throughout the focus groups, however, it became clear that swearing was an important part of managerial authority in several other situations. One example was illustrated in the comments of a group of PL players who described how their coaches typically spoke to them during training:

3. Like say if you do something he’ll just go ‘That was shit’.
  2. You’ll have the game of your life and like you’ll have played well but he’ll still point out
  3. [Interrupts] Something bad you’ve done.
  2. ‘Oh but you done this, just work on that’ ...
  3. It’s in front of everybody.
  2. Yeah it is, he’ll go round.
  5. He’ll go through the whole team and say ‘You did this, you did that’.
  7. He did it today. Everyone was standing there and he went though everyone.
  3. Make an absolute show of someone.
  5. And like ... once he went to me ‘Listen bollocks’, called me bollocks! I thought Fuckin hell, that’s a bit harsh innit?
- (Year 2, Club 11)

From the perspective of management staff, persistent use of such language and verbal exchanges may well be intended to operate as a form of social control to minimize perceived weaknesses in performance (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959), but it was also evident that it impacted on the welfare of players since it was interpreted by them as a means of intimidating them, of scaring them, and of reinforcing their marginal position in the club. For example, when asked about the purpose of the coaches and managers swearing at them, one group of players at a League One club said that its function was to:

- 3. Scare us.
  - 5. Scare us and tell us who's boss.
  - 4. Nah, not scare us.
  - 7. Put us in place.
  - 4. No, to liven us up. 'Cos if he goes mad at us it's just so like we won't be lazy will we?
  - 1. We shouldn't be lazy anyway though.
  - 8. I think at the end of the day they want what's best for us ain't they? Even if they do eff and jeff.
- (Year 1, Club 10)

A consistent theme of the focus group discussions surrounding the coaches' use of swearing was the differential responses and justifications players gave to such behaviour. Although some players rationalized the tendency for coaches to swear when shouting and passing critical comment on their performance as the most appropriate method for motivating players to perform better, for other players this was not always the case. Some players, as in the following example taken from a focus group held at a PL club, felt such had an adverse impact on their performance:

- 6. Like instead of saying 'Oh that first half wasn't good enough'
- 3. [Interrupts] Come on.
- 6. And this is what you need to do and try and motivate you he will just

2. [Interrupts] Get into you.
  6. Rip into you and say
  2. [Interrupts] Pummel you and rip you to pieces.
  6. Just like get into you.
  1. Because he thinks that if you get into them that is going to motivate you, but some people need motivating by praise. Some people do need motivating by having a telling off so it gets them angry, but
  7. [Interrupts] Like if you have a go at some of our team that's it they're gone.
  1. They just switch off.
- (Year 2, Club 20)

Indeed, it was not uncommon for many players to suggest that the process of being 'ripped to pieces' often severely compromised the confidence they had in their ability to perform at the desired level. Rather than motivating some players, being 'ripped into' had the unintended consequence (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom, 1977) of leaving them feeling unhappy, intimidated and bullied; in short, as 'stigmatized' and discredited (Goffman, 1963). When speaking about a previous club they had attended, one group of players who were at a League One club at the time the focus group was held described how being shouted at led them to consider their future in the game:

1. We didn't enjoy it at all did we?
  2. No I felt like quitting football, and it was meant to be like a high club, and it's just, the way they acted towards the kids is not right.
- Q. What did they do?
2. Shouting, swearing.
  5. Just intimidating wan' it?
  2. Bullying you. If you made a mistake they would just absolutely bully you off the pitch.
  1. Knocks your confidence and sometimes made you feel like that small in games.
- (Year 1, Club 3)

It was also clear that among other players the steady stream of cutting remarks from coaches in which swearing was routinely used had a largely negative impact on the emotional well-

being and welfare of some players, for it often led them to fear their coaches and reinforced the divide between them and the club management. In this regard, it was not uncommon for players to make frequent reference to the impact that criticism from coaches had on their general feelings as well as their performance. For example, when asked about how they felt when a coach reacted to any mistakes they made by swearing and criticizing them, one group of players from a League Two club said:

- 5. In certain situations it is going to happen.
  - 1. But at times you didn't deserve it.
  - 3. Sometimes he just used to do it.
  - 5 Sometimes you need a kicking if you are not playing well, but other times you just need to get it right and a quiet word and sort it out.
  - 1. Because if you're not doing well at summat, and someone is constantly saying 'You're shit, you're shit, you're shit', it is not going to make you do any better. It is just going to make you feel even more crap.
  - 3. You need encouragement and that as well.
- (Year 2, Club 2)

Despite being couched in seemingly harmless terms, and with the intention of improving performance on the pitch, another group of players at a PL Academy similarly explained that being subject to regular criticism actually led them to feel, and play, worse:

- Q. How does it make you feel when you get ripped like that?
  - 4. Fuckin shit; you play worse.
  - 5. Yeah, it just makes you get worse and worse.
  - Q. Do you think about that when you go home?
  - 2. Yeah, it'll be on your mind if someone's like ... said something bad to you like.
  - Q. And how often would you get that?
  - 1. If you've played shit, every day. You'd get it every single day.
  - 3. No, even if you didn't play shit like you'll still get it probably once a week.
  - 1. There's not a training session you go through without him criticizing you.
- (Year 2, Club 11)

It was unambiguously clear from many players' comments that despite their intended effects, the remarks coaches offered in relation to their performances were expected features of the sub-cultural language that is normalized within professional football but which led players to internalize negative self-perceptions or self-images (Blumer, 1969; Elias, 2001). Whether it compromised their well-being or not, it was clear that to 'get on' in the game players were constrained to accept the almost constant criticism of their performances as part and parcel of being an aspiring professional. Associated with this point – and a related aspect of the culture of professional football (Chapter Four) – was that players who were perceived to be under performing were frequently ignored by coaches who also responded with a strong degree of hostility to players who questioned their decisions.

### **Coaches' relationships with players**

In the context of an Academy or CoE where training takes place most days and matches are scheduled on a weekly basis, evaluating the way they are performing on the pitch is, perhaps unsurprisingly, something that players spent a considerable amount of time contemplating and agonizing over. So keen were they to create a positive impression to coaches and other staff they were routinely required to manage their emotions on a daily basis, where pride and confidence in their performance one day can be quickly replaced with apprehension the following day, depending on their perceived performance and coaches' reaction to them. Similarly, a dip in form at any point during a season often had ramifications for the players' frame of mind as they spent time contemplating such questions as: Has the coach noticed my poor form? What are the consequences of my poor form for my chances of getting a professional contract? How can I change the situation? And, who is playing well and likely to take my place?

Answers to such questions were particularly difficult for players to arrive at since they were typically left ‘guessing’ what their coaches thought for, in the majority of clubs, the coaches often chose to express their displeasure at players’ performances by ignoring them, or significantly changing the way they acted towards them. In some cases, coaches preferred to put the onus on players to change their form because they were personally to blame for their poor performances. This process of questioning players’ performances, and therefore commitment, was described by players at a PL club who said:

4. Like in training ... [coach’s name] will be like ‘Yeah that’s shit’. Like he’ll say ‘Like that pass was shit’ and kick a ball away and [coach’s name] he’ll look at you, or he’ll say something and look at you, and then he’ll just be off with you and he won’t speak to you.

5. For the whole day.

1. Like one time I played bad on the Saturday against Arsenal, and then the Monday, like the whole week, he never spoke to me.

Q. Is this common, or is this just something that you’ve experienced?

5. Nah, it’s common.

3. It’s common.

Q. So if you played badly, when you get back, what would happen?

3. Just be blanked.

2. He wouldn’t be talking to you like, asking ‘How are you?’ He basically just

1. [Interrupts] Unless you’re [player’s name].

2. No, he won’t be like that, but he won’t be friendly. He won’t be like someone you would wanna see, like you’d try and stay away from him in a way.

(Year 2, Club 9)

Another group of players from a Championship Academy also explained that as well as being ignored, the ways in which coaches treated them depended on one fundamental matter: Had they played well? When asked how their coaches and managers often changed their behaviour towards them depending on how they are playing, the players explained:

4. One minute they are fine with you, the next they are not.

6. Depends how you play, if you are playing well, they like treat you alright.

Q. And if you are not playing well, how do they treat you?

1. However they like.
  5. Like no one can speak to them.
  3. Yeah, they just ignore you.
- (Year 1, Club 14)

For many players, not only did a dip in form constitute a point of critical reflection and generate considerable anxiety regarding their own adequacies as a footballer, significantly it meant they were continually required to second-guess what their coaches were thinking and exposed to a variety of conflicting reactions by them (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006). In terms of player welfare, for the most part the support networks that surrounded players were characterized by a belief that poor form was something for which the players themselves were held to be personally responsible, rather than their coaches which often led players to believe they had to prove they were mentally and physically strong enough to ‘turn around’ their form. Accordingly, players were constrained to manage their temporary loss of ‘self’ (Goffman, 1963) by constantly proving to coaches that they had the required ability to succeed as a professional player and were prepared to take criticism even if this meant them leading something of a lonely and isolated existence (Elias, 2001), many others within their complex interdependent networks (Dunning, 1999; Elias, 1978; Goudsblom 1977).

A related feature of the culture of professional football that came to impact on players’ relationships with coaches and their welfare in terms of performance management and enhancement was the expectation that players would not make their feelings known publically to club management. Without exception, players understood that they were constrained to act in particular ways when they were sworn at, criticized and ignored, and under no circumstances should this include them speaking out and questioning decisions taken by the coach or manager (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2012; Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006).

When asked to recount when disagreements between themselves and their coaches typically occur, one group of players from the Championship said:

3. Usually if we play bad, or like
  4. [Interrupts] You answer back or something.
  3. But you're only trying to like say something ... if he says something to you, don't have a go back but try and say what you think.
  1. They just go mad.
  4. And it's just, it's always our fault or we're never right like.
  - Q. In what ways do they suggest it's always your fault?
  2. They think they're right all the time.
  4. Yeah.
  3. We're not trying to have a bad game like. We don't wanna go out and lose, we wanna always win like. It's not our fault.
  1. It always falls back on us.
- (Year 2, Club 19)

Players at other clubs elaborated upon the ways in which they were treated if they questioned coaches' and managers' judgements. For example, when asked if they had ever answered back to the coaches whilst arguing with them, players at a PL Academy described the coaches' reaction thus:

1. You get slapped down ...
  2. You get the smack down.
  5. If you answer back things just get worse and worse.
  3. He'd be like 'Who are you to talk down to me?'
  2. No, sometimes you don't even answer them back do ya? Sometimes you just speak to them like 'Why are you answering back?'
  5. If you're gonna speak to me like that then why can't I answer you back? So I just do.
  1. Say if you say something to ya and you say something back ... they'd be like 'Oh yeah, that's right, you know it all'.
  5. Yeah.
  1. You know it all.
  5. Like you'd try and explain what you did but they'd be like 'Oh yeah, you know it all'.
- (Year 2, Club 11)



At some clubs, the coaches went a step further by encouraging players to answer them back only to reaffirm to them the importance of not doing so, despite the negative impact this had on players' confidence. One group of players at another PL club explained that their coach frequently shouted at them and openly questioned their commitment, often by asking whether they were injured, to encourage them to respond verbally to their comments:

2. I think apart from Saturday's game, he has shouted at every other game.

3. As a group.

7. Yeah, but sometimes he picks out some people, but like sometimes after games or half-time he will get into all of us...

Q. What types of things does he say?

4. Sometimes when we are playing bad, he'll just do little stupid comments like say 'Are you injured?' and all that.

3. Yeah it's like 'Are you injured?' and then obviously you say 'No' and he will be like 'F-ing run about then!'

7. Then ... if you like take a corner and it goes straight off the pitch he'll be like 'You call yourself a professional footballer' and this and that. He makes you feel that big, like proper small.

(Year 1, Club 20)

It was clear from the players' comments that, paradoxically, developing a culture where they were more-or-less constrained not to answer back to their coaches left them more exposed to criticism since, for many of them, they were unable to defend themselves by explaining their actions and seeking feedback on them (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2012; Kelly & Waddington, 2006). In certain circumstances, this appeared to have little impact on the welfare of players. At times when they were already vulnerable (such as following a defeat) and when they were playing poorly and generally low on confidence, however, not being able to discuss their performances left players wondering what impact this would have on their future at the Academy or CoE and their coaches' opinion of them. A lack of available opportunities for players to discuss their experiences within the hyper-masculine environment (Kelly &

Waddington, 2006; Parker, 1996) of professional football helped isolate players from discussing – in an open and democratic way – the pressures to which they were subject with coaches, despite the welfare issues this raised. In this regard, it was not altogether surprising that, for many players, there existed a clear culture of mistrust between themselves and club management, which is examined in more detail next.

### *A culture of mistrust*

One consequence of the above treatment of players by club management was the development of a general culture of distrust between them, which frequently resulted in players withholding particularly important information about their welfare for fear of the ramifications this may have for them. It was not uncommon for players to claim that coaches and managers treated them differently depending on the social context involved. Players from a Championship club, for example, reflected upon their experiences of this as follows:

6. Yeah, they smile behind your back.

Q. In what ways?

3. They are nice to your face

4. [Interrupts] Then behind your back they slag us off.

2. Speak to the manager about us.

(Year 1, Club 14)

Players' suspicions about the degree of trust they were able to place in the hands of club management also related to off-the-field matters, particularly when players would learn of inconsistencies in the views expressed by their manager, or coach, about their performances through conversations with each other. In this respect, players came to the conclusion that the coach, or manager, was simply trying to keep them happy, rather than revealing their honest opinion about them and their abilities. This was particularly true in relation to coaches' and

managers' conduct concerning team selection on match days. Rather than telling players who was playing in advance, a number of coaches or managers, particularly in important games, did not disclose whether they were playing until arriving at the ground at which the game was being played. In a discussion about their coach, and their relationship with him, the following extract from a focus group held with players from a Championship club describes one occasion when players were left confused and disappointed regarding team selection:

- 7. How about Youth Cup when he left us out, when we played Swindon?
  - 2. Yeah, like he made us go all the way to Swindon, and then told us in Swindon we are not going to be in the squad.
  - 7. The day, like a few hours before, like an hour ...
  - 2. And like you have told your mum and dad you are playing. What if I had brought my mum and dad and I go and am not playing?
  - 7. Or even on the team sheet.
  - 4. He might have thought that you would have got that mind-set where you'd have been mucking around on the way up there and you would have probably got other people
  - 2. [Interrupts] Nah.
  - 4. That's what I think he might have thought would have happened.
  - 7. Yeah, I think he probably did, but still you can't do that to players.
  - 2. That was heart-wrenching.
  - 4. You knew you was gonna be on the bench.
  - 2. That was heart-wrenching.
- (Year 2, Club 8)

Players also became increasingly aware of the tendencies of their coach or manager, and the inconsistencies in their approaches towards their needs, to manipulate situations for their own advantage, whilst matches were being played. Typically, substitutions were the focus of players' discussions, since they were used by the coach or manager to illicit a response from players as a way of highlighting their poor performances and, on a handful of occasions, as a way of humiliating them. When asked how their manager acted during games, players from a PL club discussed how substitutes warming-up was seen as a sign for the starting eleven that the manager or coach was displeased with their performance. For the substitutes themselves,

however, the symbolic significance (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1963) of warming-up was not seen as an opportunity to get on to the pitch, but rather as an extension of the ways in which they were often used by the manager for his own purpose. The players said:

2. He will make you warm-up for the full 90 minutes and then you won't get on.
  1. I know, yeah. That is just stupid. That actually hurts you.
  3. And then by the time you come on, you are knackered.
  2. So for the starting eleven, for the first ten minutes, if they aren't playing that well, he will tell the subs to go and warm-up. Even though he knows that the subs aren't going to come on for now, he will tell you to go and warm-up. You can't stretch, you are told to keep on the move.
  1. He can get so angry.
  2. You just keep jogging up and down and by the time you are ready to go on the pitch, you are tired.
  5. Then when you get on the pitch, he is expecting you to be sprinting up and down the pitch. You just can't do it.
- (Year 1, Club 20)

Whilst 'getting onto the pitch' may have been conveniently regarded as a positive sign, or symbol, that the coach or manager had trust in a player to make a contribution to the team's performance, replacing one of the starting eleven players opened up the possibility of further humiliation for players. On a handful of occasions, players felt that the coach or manager would use substitutions, consciously and unconsciously, to highlight further the relatively powerful positions they occupied within their figuration (Elias, 1978; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998) and to degrade players with little regard for how this impacted on their self-identity and sense of self (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1959). These issues were brought out particularly clearly by players at a PL club, who discussed the actions of their previous coach who had subsequently moved to another league club in the following way:

7. I come on at half-time, two minutes later he took me off, literally two minutes. I went all the way to Doncaster, do you remember that? Took me off two minutes later. I thought 'What's going on?' I just started to get in the game. I was like playing a few

passes and I said 'Is he taking the piss?', I said it quite loud. He's pulled me off, he goes 'Did you say, you're taking the piss?', I said 'No I was talking to [Player's name]

1. Remember what he done to me against Bolton? Like I was on the bench and then he [coach] goes to the ref 'How long's left?', he goes 'Oh, I'm gonna blow after this' and then he was like 'Yeah come on [Player's name], quick, quick, quick', and he put me on like and then as soon as I ran on the whistle went.

2. Run.

3. The whistle went as soon as I went on the field. It's degrading. Do you know what I mean?

1. And then, when we was in the changing room, he goes to one of the players, 'Ask [Players' name] how he think he played and that', like taking the piss.

(Year 2, Club 5)

The inconsistency with which club management were said to act in relation to players and their trust of them extended to training. In the following example, taken from a focus group held at a Championship club, the players recalled how they were often encouraged to engage in extra training to enhance their performances but when they sought to put their coach's advice into practice they were often prevented from doing so without any clear rationale or justification. They said:

7. We could ask if we're going the gym or something.

1. Or sometimes, like we had a talk the other day from [Director of Football], and he said, 'Just go out and play, just go out' ... if you think you wanna go out and shoot and stuff like that. Training on us own. We ask them, 'Oh, can we get head tennis out, we're bored', they say 'No'.

2. Like if we say 'Can we stay out?', like 'Can we get a goal out and do some shooting?', they say 'No'.

6. So we're being told to do stuff on our own and then when we come to ask they say 'No' ...

1. They've stopped us going in the gym as well.

5. I think it's just 'cos they wanna show you that they're boss.

4. But if you went to the first team manager and he had a word with him, he'd shit his sen [self] won't he? And say 'Yeah go on lads'.

(Year 2, Club 13)

Such was the apparent distrust players had for the coaches and managers, they also claimed to be unwilling to discuss other personal matters out of fear that these would be disclosed to significant others, most notably the first team manager and teammates. This distrust, which is not confined to Academies and CoE, and is particularly prevalent at the professional level of the game around the management of injuries (Roderick, 2006), was a good example of the consequences of the unequal distribution of power that characterized relations between coaches, managers and players. In particular it was an opposite example of how these relations were not solely defined around economic dimensions of power, but also included ‘*emotional* dimension of this network of power relationships’ (Roderick, 2006, p. 65; emphasis in original). In this study, players referred to the (mis)trust they had for their coaches, however, for players, the powerful position of the coaches and managers relative to their own position, and the impact the information might have on the perception of their attitude, constrained them to centrally engage in impression management (Goffman, 1959) and conceal their true feelings as they sought to orientate themselves in their figurations (Elias, 1978). Accordingly, this left players wondering how, if at all, their confessions would be received or treated: Would the coach be caring and understanding of the situation or take it as a sign that they were weak and not able to concentrate fully on their football career? Were they someone who would be unlikely to survive a career in professional football?

*‘Things getting back’: compromising player welfare*

Of particular concern to players regarding their welfare was the notion that any information they discussed with their coaches or managers would become common knowledge around their Academy or CoE. Indeed, despite the claimed importance of safeguarding player welfare (e.g. The Football League Trust, 2010), the majority of players claimed that they would rather discuss their well-being with family or friends, rather than with their coaches or

managers. For example, when asked what they would do if they wished to discuss a personal matter with their family, relative or partner, one group of players at a Championship club replied:

4. I wouldn't see any of them!

1. No.

Q. You wouldn't speak to anyone about that?

1. Not them. Like not people at football.

Q. Why not?

1. Speak to my friends and

6. [Interrupts] I don't think you can trust too many people here.

3. Because ... some people, I think, they can be a bit sly.

(Year 2, Club 17)

Many players formed similar impressions because of the ways in which coaches spoke to them about other players in their own team, or in other years. The following extract taken from a focus group discussion with Championship players illustrated how this came to impact on what they were prepared to disclose to their coach:

6. Sometimes he tells us about other players.

2. Yeah, that's the only thing.

4. Yeah, sometimes he tells us about other players.

5. He tells us about other players' issues that they have come to him, so then we are then a bit wary whether to tell him about our issues.

2. Because one player [Player's name]

5. [Interrupts] He always brings up how they have had hard issues in their life, which may be they didn't want people to know about, but he will be like, 'Oh, if he doesn't mind me saying' but the other person hasn't told him that he can say it.

2. He doesn't know. That is why I wouldn't immediately tell him something personal, because maybe if you're not there, he will be like 'I'm sure [Player's name] wouldn't mind but ...'

(Year 1, Club 8)

Among the numerous other ways players felt their coaches and managers would behave if they were to discuss personal concerns with them related to the ways in which information regarding their welfare could be used by club staff as a reason for releasing them. Players from a Championship club discussed how one player, whom they had known personally, had been released having been seen outside the club, and, how coaches at their club used information about other players' private lives as a way of taunting them:

- 3. Like one boy has been released because of a coach seeing him out and that.
  - 6. And the coach would go to him 'Don't worry, I won't say anything', and the next minute he's been kicked out.
  - 2. Because the coaches didn't like him that much.
  - 8. [Interrupts] They wanted a reason to get rid of him.
  - 2. They were like looking for an excuse, because other lads were out that night as well, and he was the only one that got caught ...
  - 6. Well I've like seen a coach out before and he was just like, he hasn't told anyone, but he says sly, like little, comments.
  - 8. [Interrupts] Like when you're at training.
  - 6. Yeah, when another coach's there.
  - Q. Such as?
  - 6. Just like, 'That girl Tasha was quite nice wasn't she?' And stuff like that and I'm thinking like, 'There's no need to say anything', because then the other coach will go 'Who's that girl Tasha? Where did you see him?' And like just little comments and that.
- (Year 2, Club 17)

By focusing on personal matters on and off the pitch, there were also a number of instances where players expressed their concern that the accounts they gave to coaches, even if they remained confidential, would be regarded by them as a sign that they were not focused on their football career. In the way discussions about education and future career planning were often categorized and viewed as a sign that they were not concentrating sufficiently on football (Chapter Five), players assumed that other sensitive matters would be interpreted in a similar way. Indeed, when asked about the dilemmas they faced when deciding to discuss



personal issues with club staff, the following group of players from a PL club said that if they did so:

1. Then they [club staff] will just get it in their head that you don't want to be here.
  4. [Interrupts] Yeah.
  1. And then you will never get a chance, ever.
  4. Because they say things like, 'We want to know what you really think', but you know that they don't really want to know. Because if you tell them ... in their head are constantly thinking 'Oh, we won't help him now, we won't try and develop him if he doesn't want to, if he's not fully focused.'
- (Year 2, Club 20)

Players from a Championship club harboured similar concerns about speaking with anyone at the club about personal issues:

3. Personally I wouldn't go to the coaches if I'm honest.
  2. No, I don't think I'd go to the coaches.
  - Q. Why is that?
  3. Well I don't know 'cos.
  4. [Interrupts] They might tell you that they're able to help but then you think if I'm telling them this they're not gonna be happy.
  - Q. What wouldn't they be happy about?
  4. Well like stuff you said like, if you're having, I don't know, gambling and stuff, I don't think we can be out gambling.
- (Year 1, Club 19)

The conflict of interest that evidently characterized player-manager relations raised serious questions about the extent to which player welfare can properly be regarded as a matter of concern for clubs. Indeed, in many cases, it appeared that the public disclosure of personal matters actually compromised players' well-being (Brackenridge, 2007; Pitchford, 2007). Indeed, players did not seem to have a consistent outlet for their issues and were constrained, because of the perception that any issues impacting on their lives would simultaneously cause

them to lose focus on their football career, to seek guidance from people away from the club to keep them to themselves. As the next section indicates, this was also often true when players dealt with EWOs.

### **Education and Welfare Officers' relations with coaches**

The culture of mistrust that characterized the relationship between coaches, managers and the players was also central to the relationship players had with the EWO, or where an EWO was not employed by a club, the person responsible for the education and welfare. The suspicion players had of the ways in which confidential matters would be treated by EWOs (or their equivalent) was typically aroused by the assumed closeness and association between those responsible for their education and welfare and the coaches and management around them. As explained in Chapter Four, over the course of their two year scholarship or apprenticeship players perceived there to be a clear separation between them and members of the clubs hierarchy, which included those responsible for welfare. Not surprisingly, therefore, players learnt very quickly that in the closed social world (Roderick, 2006; Waddington, 2011) of professional football club staff often 'talk', that is, communicate their thoughts about players often without them knowing whilst 'back-stage' (Goffman, 1959). The difficulties this raises in relation to players' welfare was brought out particularly clearly in two focus groups held at a Championship club. In a discussion with the first year players it was clear that the closeness between the coaches and the EWO meant that players were constrained to consider very carefully the personal matters they were willing to discuss with the EWO. As they put it:

- 4. Coaches talk.
- 2. They talk.
- 7. I just think they all talk and they all know.
- 2. They talk and he is like a fly on the wall.
- 7. But he gets information from everyone because he just goes about so he hears it ...

1. I talk to [EWO] but I have to be careful what I say to him.

Q. Why is that?

5. I'd just wonder if he is going to tell someone what you say ...

6. He's like the mediator between the staff and the players.

3. He'll say like, 'Not mentioning any names, [Player's name] doesn't do like...'

All. Laugh

7. Yeah, that the kind of thing.

Q. So, what kind of things would you discuss with him then if you genuinely think that he could do that? ...

1. If you didn't agree with something that like a member of staff said. Or like you didn't like a member of staff and you told him. I wouldn't say that ...

4. [Interrupts] If I was one-on-one with him, I wouldn't do it if I was with other people. Only if I was one-on-one because I think he wouldn't say anything...

6. I think he'd say something like 'I think there are some boys round here that...' He won't actually say who said it, but he will go to the coaches and say 'There are a couple of boys that are not feeling right about you'.

(Year 1, Club 8)

Among the second year players at the club the considerable degree of mistrust was even more marked and meant that insofar as players only discussed matters relating to their education and accommodation with the EWO. The disclosure of more personal matters was by comparison strictly avoided and, in this respect, the role of the EWO was interpreted rather narrowly by players as being about education. When asked about how, if at all, they discussed personal matters with their EWO, the players replied:

8. You have got to keep to yourself innit? Like sort it out yourself.

2. Like there are a few of us ... but like there is (sic) different groups of friends ... If you got a problem you'll obviously speak to your group and just talk to them.

Q. So what do you think [EWO name] job is?

2. To help us with our education. Basically education.

1. Well you could speak to him, but it's really down to you what you want to do and who you talk to about your problems.

5. And accommodation.

6. Yeah, accommodation. He sorted out us three.

4. I haven't really spoken to him about any other problems other than sort ... if it's not education. And certainly these three live in digs so I talk to him about education.

(Year 2, Club 8)

Similar concerns regarding the disclosure of confidential matters and the tendency for things to ‘get back’ to other club staff was recalled by players at other clubs. At one PL club, for example, players noted that the ways in which they spoke to their EWO, and what they were prepared to say, was significantly influenced by the relationship the EWO had with the Academy manager and in turn the relationship the Academy manager had with the first team manager. The players began by outlining their thoughts on the EWO at the club thus:

1. He will help you but.
  2. He will go back and tell the manager.
    1. He’s like paid by [the manager], so the Academy manager ... if we say something to him, then ... it’s kind of up to him to tell [the manager].
    2. It’s good in a way because if you’re not happy at the club, you can tell him [the EWO] say ‘Ah, I’m thinking about moving to so and so and this and that’, and drop little hints and I want him to go back to [the manager], and I know he’s going to go back to [the manager] and the manager will be like ‘Oh, what’s up [Player’s name], will you tell me what’s going on?’. Then you can tell him, I’m not happy and that, then you can talk to him about that.
- (Year 2, Club 5)

It was notable, however, that in the few instances where the trust of the players had been gained by those who were responsible for welfare, such as an EWO, this was dependent upon whether the latter had sacrificed aspects of their relationship (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2012; Parker, 1996) as a means of demonstrating to players that they were not part of the ‘establishment’. One expression of the ways in which players were more willing to discuss their lives with those who were seen as being disassociated with the ‘establishment’ of the club arose in the comments they made about relationships with ‘external’ people whose job it was to safeguard player welfare. Indeed, many players said that they were more willing to divulge particularly sensitive information with people who were not seen as being connected with the club, as in the following example where a group of players at a PL club were comparing their discussion of welfare matters with the EWO and coach:

1. I'd think about speaking to [EWO] like ...
  2. Oh, yeah, [EWO]. Or who's that new lad?
  6. [External's name] ... He's a ledge.
  2. He's sound. Lad, I was nearly crying with him you know, some of the stuff I was telling him. I was letting some shit out.
  - Q. But you wouldn't go and speak to your coach?
  1. No.
  5. No.
  2. Laughs.
  3. Fancy telling [coach's name] you'd got your bird pregnant; he'd probably release you or something.
  - All. Laugh.
  4. He tries to rip people ... about not banging birds and that.
- (Year 2, Club 11)

Other players also seemed more at ease discussing sensitive issues with people who were not associated with their club, particularly when those personnel charged with discussing welfare-related issues with players were former professional players who had 'made it' in the game, but had themselves experienced difficulties of various throughout their career. In this regard, the status of such personnel helped legitimize them in the players' eyes, and even though they had been socialized into the culture of football like many coaches and managers, they were generally perceived as being less likely to let things 'get back' to the club. Accordingly, these relationships assumed something of those between an NHS doctor and patient, which is bound to a strict code of ethics that prevents the disclosure of confidential matters to outsiders (Waddington, 2011). In the following example, a group of players from another PL club discuss two ex-professionals who were employed to educate them about certain areas of their private life and lifestyle management:

2. I wouldn't come and talk to no one.
1. They say they want you to speak to them about it, but personally I wouldn't speak to none if I had a problem at home. They have these people in ... [External's name] who used to be an ex-pro and he was an alcoholic, drugs, gambling addict etc, and they

come in and like talk to us ... They'll say like 'If you don't want to talk in front of your team mates ... you can give us a meeting time'.

2. They are there to talk to really ...

1. They do it for both of us. Because like at a young age they were saying like 'When someone was coming in telling them, they was thinking, 'Oh nah, he's like talking shit like', but from his point and from his career he's seen it go down hill. So if he'd have listened when he was younger, he might have stayed at a higher standard throughout his whole career ...

1. They're employed by the club but they say that it's confidential.

(Year 2, Club 5)

It was clear that among the players involved in the study they continually lived in fear that the consequences of reporting an important welfare matter may impact on their chances of gaining a professional contract at the end of their scholarship or apprenticeship and, with few exceptions, this significantly constrained them to limit the kinds of issues they were prepared to discuss. As noted earlier, this required them, in the main to seek guidance away from the 'stage' of their Academy or CoE, and this included the very people who were supposed to be assisting in such matters: the EWOs. When discussing similar issues in relation to pain and injury, Roderick (2006, p. 70; original emphasis) argues that the challenge for many players is to 'manage and control information in such a way that they avoid *becoming* discredited'. This is the same with young players and any concerns they have regarding welfare. In the focus groups, players were asked on numerous occasions what they would do should they find out, for example, that their girlfriend was pregnant or if they were struggling with gambling problems and debt. The response was the same on every occasion, they would not discuss it for fear that it would reflect poorly on them as a person and would highlight to coaches or managers that they were not focusing on football, were likely to be untrustworthy and had thought they had already 'made it'. In this respect, although the EWOs in this study need adding to the list of people, it is fair to conclude that:

The problem is not that they [players] must face prejudice against them, but that they must control information among managers and teammates who are prejudices against players of the kind they can be revealed to be. (Roderick, 2006, p. 70)

Exacerbating this issue for many of the scholars was the lack of family support when they were required to leave home at the age of 16. As the next section highlights, moving into digs further compromised, at times, the welfare of the players in this study.

### **Living in ‘digs’ and away from home**

Equally noteworthy was the extent to which the close monitoring of players outside of the club was predicated on the assumption that they could not be trusted to behave responsibly. Of particular relevance were the experiences many players recalled in relation to their use of accommodation provided by the club whilst completing their scholarship or apprenticeship. Living in ‘digs’, as players called them, was something many players viewed in rather negative terms, particularly because it often led to further feelings of home sickness and isolation from the outside world, which strengthened players’ perceptions of themselves as *Homo clausus* (Elias, 1978). The accommodation circumstances in which young players found themselves were also said to impose unreasonable restrictions on the ways in which they spent their leisure time, and because they exacerbated the concerns players had about the surveillance they were under from club staff. When speaking specifically about living in the accommodation itself, players who moved into digs often suggested that ‘it’s not like being at home’, or spoke about their failure to develop positive relationships with the families with whom they had been placed. This led many players to suggest they required additional support in order to help them cope with the demands of living away from home, and making the transition to full-time work, which is experienced by some other young people their age

(Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; MacDonald, 2011; Roberts, 1996). This support, however, was not reflected in the experiences described by players, who often portrayed their time in digs as an extension of the life they experienced at their Academy or CoE.

At some clubs, players were housed in accommodation owned by the clubs themselves, which often took the form of one building purposely built to house a number of first and second year players. At other clubs, players were housed with families – who accommodated them voluntarily or for a fee paid for by the clubs – in their homes, either on their own or in pairs. Regardless of how they were accommodated, all players made similar observations regarding their broad experiences of living in digs. Of particular significance was the suggestion that things about their behaviour outside of the club typically ‘got back’ to the EWO and, as a consequence, players were constrained to act in ways that were deemed acceptable by the club. The extent to which players’ behaviour was regulated by clubs was often raised when players discussed the time they were expected to return to their digs each evening. One group of PL players who were conscious of the consequences of being late, described their experiences as follows:

2. If you’re in digs like it’s pretty much like
  5. [Interrupts] Unlucky man.
  2. Yeah ... even though you’re out of the training ground we’re still pretty much on the football thing because ... you can’t go out late at night like.
  4. They report back to [EWO's name] anyway.
  2. Yeah, if you miss curfew like the digs woman will like basically say ‘Oh, he came in at like 10 minutes past 10 tonight’ ... So you’re thinking ‘Oh, I got training tomorrow, just get to bed early or something like that’.
- (Year 2, Club 9)



Another group of players at another PL club drew similar conclusions and explained that they felt constantly under surveillance even when they were in their digs:

1. You feel like you are being watched all the time.
  - Q. Why is that?
  1. My bedroom door doesn't even lock.
  2. Anything you do bad, they just report it to [Club name].
  1. You can just push my door and it will open. The dogs go in my room and that ...
  - Q. So anything you do bad will get back to [Club name]?
  2. If we do anything bad, they will contact [Club name].
  7. Because the digs parents work for [Club name].
  2. Like they get paid.
  7. They get paid to look after us.
  1. They get paid to tell [Club name] everything ...
  3. Like if we are late
  2. [Interrupts] Curfew is at 10, but if we come back at 11.
  1. Yeah, like if you miss dinner or whatever.
  5. Like if your room is dirty man.
- (Year 1, Club 20)

The restrictions that players felt when living in digs were not confined to PL clubs. The following groups of players from a Championship club, for example, noted how their experience of living in digs was particularly shaped by the extent to which they felt under surveillance from their carers, who formed a crucial dimension of their figurations (Elias, 1978):

4. It was good like.
  7. It was good.
  2. Yeah, but they were shit carers.
  7. Every one hated the carers.
  - Q. Why were they shit carers?
  4. They just didn't care, they fed us shite.
  2. They snitched and everything.
  4. In the house, say you went for a piss at 3 o'clock in the morning they'd write it down.
  7. Yeah, you had no freedom.
- (Year 2, Club 15)

Given the extent to which players' leisure time was closely regulated by clubs or their representatives, many players claimed to spend much of their free time in digs, which they routinely described as being 'boring'. The comments of second year players at a Championship club illustrate the views of many other players who described the large amounts of time they spent on their own in their own private rooms as follows:

1. Oh, that is the worst.
  6. That is the worst thing.
  4. Basically, you just go and sit in your room for like 5 hours a day.
  3. It's like a prison.
  4. It is not your house, so they're like 'Oh yeah, you live here and that, you can do whatever'
  5. [Interrupts] Obviously you don't feel comfortable.
  4. It's not your house so you are basically in your rooms. You are just in your room for the whole week. Basically, it is shit.
- (Year 2, Club 14)

Another group of players at a Championship club similarly noted how 'boring' their leisure time can be, in part, because they were constrained by the fact that they were in digs, but also because of the strenuous nature of the job they were undertaking daily. In this regard, as explained in Chapter Four, when compared to other young people their age, players were often constrained to spend time in their rooms. When referring to their digs and time at home, the players claimed:

2. Boring. Tucked away like ...
5. Yeah.
2. Yeah well you can't walk to nowhere.
- Q. So what is boring about it?
2. Just that you can't go out really.
5. Go in, have food, go to bed, that's it. Just sit in the bedroom.
1. Even if you're from [name of place] it's so boring. It's so boring being at home because you know.

3. Sometimes you're just too tired to do anything, after a hard days training you just wanna chill like in your bedroom on your own.  
(Year 2, Club 19)

The final theme of players testimonies related to their welfare was their willingness to meet the expectations others have of them to play with pain and injury.

### **Playing with pain and injury**

For reasons explained in Chapter One, playing with pain and injury is typically seen as being part and parcel of the life of a professional footballer, and this is something that is normalized from an early age despite its impact on players' welfare (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al*, 2000). Not surprisingly, there was, without exception, agreement among the players in this study that playing with pain and injury was a common feature of their day-to-day lives within their club and it was not uncommon for them to want to continue playing, wherever possible, despite the inherent risks involved. When questioned about their experiences of playing with pain and injury, one group of players from a League One club said:

4. Well if it's not too bad, you don't wanna come off do ya'?

5. If we think it's ok, play on.

Q. What type of things will you play on with?

5. Dead legs.

8. Just a little knock or something.

1. Dead legs? You can't play on a dead leg.

5. No like

4. [Interrupts] Little ones.

5. Like a little knock. Don't know really, a minor pull in a muscle, nothing too extreme though otherwise you just kill yourself, like you get even worse.

(Year 1, Club 10)

For second year players, the importance of playing on when in pain or even whilst injured was particularly notable, specifically because of their need to play as many games as possible in their final year and impress the managers and coaches. In this respect, it was not unusual, as with the following group of players from a Championship club, to conceal their injuries from the coaches, should be forced to sit out games:

- 3. I try and not say 'I'm injured', I wouldn't want to risk that.
  - 1. Yeah, I wouldn't say that.
  - 4. Obviously it is such a big year
  - 5. [Interrupts] Unless it is really, really bad.
  - 4. I just want to play as many games as I can to like show I am good enough really ...
  - 3. Oh, yeah, I have been playing with a bad ankle for about 2 weeks but I don't want to say ... 'I'm injured'.
  - 2. Like my knee.
  - Q. Does anyone know about the injury?
  - 3. Obviously I'm getting it strapped up and that, and it's painful when I play and train, but it's one of them, I'm just gonna have to get through it.
  - 6. My knee's been hurting for like 2 weeks, then on Saturday it swelled up for no reason, but I'm still training. I can't afford to stop.
- (Year 2, Club 14)

It was clear, therefore, that players felt that an ability to play when in differing degrees of pain, or with different kinds of injuries, was something they had to expect as part of their profession. One way in which this was articulated by players was through the categorization of injuries into major and minor ones. There were two types of injury: 'minor' were those that a player was able to play with and 'major' ones that resulted in time being spent away from training and playing matches for rest and treatment. But what was the frequency with which players were exposed to pain and injury? Once again, there was a commonly held view that players who train full-time in professional Academies and CoE are rarely, if ever, totally free from pain or injury. The regularity with which players played with pain and injury, and their desire to return to playing as quickly as possible, led many players to suggest that they

hardly ever felt '100% fit'. Like many others in the study, one group of players from a League Two club explained:

2. I think last year, majority of us were playing, training every day stiff, 'cos we were doing so much.
  3. Like stiff.
  2. Like no one felt 100%.
  1. Like on a Saturday you'd always feel.
  6. I think it's a reason why we done so bad last season as well.
  1. 'Cos we were doing brilliant on a Friday before a game, sprints and that ...
  5. I don't think they expect us, but we play with them because we think we won't have enough chance, we don't want to ruin our chances if you know what I mean ...
  2. Well yeah, but you it's just taking that chance, that gamble, that it's only just a niggle, that'll wear off, but if it gets worse, you're gonna have to stay out.
  5. They could tell you, like you don't wanna hear that you could be out for six weeks. Then in six weeks you wanna be playing and you got another six weeks to get fit.
- (Year 2, Club 21)

Not only were players constrained by their own desire to play when they were in pain or injured, but it was also clear that, as noted in Chapter One, there was a cultural expectation that players would show they were 'man enough' to play professionally by playing with pain and injury (Roderick, 2006). The following group of players from a PL club, for example, noted how the coaches often used derogatory words and phrases as a way of highlighting to players that being injured on a regular basis was unacceptable:

- Q. Have any of you played when you've not really felt 100% fit?
3. Yeah, all of us have because of that.
  1. Play like that every week.
- Q. Because of what?
3. Like because of what he's saying, like that they think you're a faggot.
- Q. Every week?
1. Every other week, every other week you'll have a knock or something. But I think everyone does that, but I reckon it's worse here.
  5. I play when I'm knackered as well.
- Q. Why?

5. Like I come in on a Saturday like, not wanting to get out of bed because I'm that fucked, and the just come to the game and play.
  2. Bad that man.
- (Year 2, Club 11)

These data begin to shed light on the apparently paradoxical state of affairs where groups of players were well aware that playing with pain and injury might harm their health, and even impact on their ability to perform should they be awarded a professional contract, but at the same time, they were seemingly constrained to play when they are in pain or injured for fear of being stigmatized (Goffman, 1963) as someone who is a 'shirker' (Roderick, 2006) and, therefore, not 'man enough' to warrant a career in professional football. Stemming from the mythological view in the professional game that 'a period of injury is an "easy option" – in order to avoid the rigours of training or playing' (Roderick, 2006, p. 70), players have to demonstrate that they are keen, even if they are struggling with an injury. Consequently, players in this study reported similar feelings as those in Roderick's (2006) study, namely that they very rarely, if ever, go out to play when they are 100% fit. As well as managing the impression that they were not weak, and by concealing injuries from coaches and managers, there was also a perception among the players that playing when in pain or injured could have positive connotations for the coach's and manager's opinions of their 'attitude' and in particular the notion that they possessed 'character' (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000; Waddington, 2011).

As noted in Chapter One, professional football is characterized by a hyper-masculine culture in which toughness, bravery and desire are qualities that are not only admired but are viewed as essential traits of anyone wishing to succeed at the professional level of the game. It was argued by some players that playing when injured, or in pain, is a positive trait and valued by

managers since this demonstrated that they have the ‘right attitude’ and ‘character’. In that regard, it was clear that the importance of this character was reinforced to the players throughout their two years from different areas. When exploring why they need to be seen playing with pain and injury, even when they questioned it themselves, players from a Championship club emphasized the importance of ‘character’ and showing that they cared for the team:

- 4. They said it shows character, and that’s what they like to see or something like that.
- 7. That’s just fuckin stupid.
- Q. They like to see character by playing injured?
- 1. So you are risking your health.
- 2. It shows you care for your team.
- 4. They think you are being tough.
- 7. But not when it’s really hurting.
- 1. That’s what i’m saying.
- 7. But you are not helping your team when you are injured.
- 6. But it’s like the professional attitude again, like we said about the old managers ... Tradition they say, ‘Oh yeah, broken arm, play through it, you’re alright’ sort of thing. (Year 1, Club 8)

The commonly-held view that being prepared to play with pain and injury was viewed by coaches and managers as a demonstration of their ‘good attitude’ meant that many players sought to distance themselves from being perceived and stigmatized as ‘weak’ or ‘soft’ or malingering (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000). These characteristics of the ‘non-producer’ were described by players from a PL club who also emphasized that not playing with injury meant that they lost valuable time to ‘impress’ the coach or manager:

- 1. You’re missing out ... you’re missing out to prove ... to the coach that you’re good enough. So you’re missing out all the time.
- Q. Has there ever been any instances where you haven’t told the coach that you’re injured or hurting and just carried on playing?
- 4. Yeah.

1. Yeah.

Q. Can you think of an example last time you did it?

3. Last time we trained I was a bit ill, but you just don't tell him because he thinks you're soft as owt.

1. When I broke my toe, I never like told the physio's for like 3 weeks, like carried on playing and that.

(Year 1, Club 18)

In view of the ways in which injured players were viewed by coaches, they sought, wherever possible, to avoid becoming discredited (Goffman, 1963) by cultivating a reputation for being able to cope with pain and injury and avoiding getting a reputation for regularly complaining of being in pain or injured (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000; Waddington, 2011). When asked how injured players are viewed by the coaches at their club, players at a League Two club highlighted the contradictory character of disclosing and concealing injuries and how this was experienced personally:

3. The highest coach ... if you do train on an injury, then like you'll get shouted at and stuff for like training on that injury, but say if you go off the pitch for an injury you're seen as weak. Like they moan at you for coming off. Like 'I'm sure you could carry on' or something like that.

5. It depends who you are.

Q. In what way?

5. It depends what reputation you have like. If you are known as that kid that likes to sack off things and be a bad lad ... they'll think you're faking it. But if you're a hard working player who, you know, doesn't wanna miss things but you are injured and you can't help it, then they'll feel sympathy for you.

1. For example, for me, the way I feel, it's like, if I get injured, they expect me to stay on because I'm so tall and I might look older than everyone. I get the slightest injury and I feel I can't play, they'll see me as weak so it's just something you have to put up with.

(Year 1, Club 21)



That coaches and managers regularly questioned whether players were injured or not as a way of determining their commitment and desire was also discussed by players at a PL club who said:

3. It's what the coaches say to you and that.

Q. What would he say?

4. No they just look down on you and that, as if they're questioning you like.

1. Why are you injured and that?

4. Yeah, why you're injured.

5. Like when I broke my wrist, our goalie coach was saying, 'Why haven't you been doing, you know like your thingies to make it stronger?' And it's like, how do you know I've not been doing them? Oh shit.

1. [Player's name] getting all emotional and that.

5. I know, I fuckin' hate him you know.

(Year 2, Club 11)

#### *Inconveniencing and isolating injured players*

Playing with pain and injury, then, was a further way in which players went about proving they had the desired attitude to become a professional footballer, and this had clear impacts on their health and welfare. But there are further, perhaps less obvious, ways in which the constraints under which the players were operating came to compromise other aspects of their welfare. Of particular note, was the number of times players drew attention to the ways in which coaches treated them when they were injured. It became apparent that, in many clubs, it was common place for the coaches and managers to more-or-less systematically ignore and otherwise inconvenience the players who were injured, which is similarly common among professional players (Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000; Waddington, 2011). When asked how their coaches treated them when they were injured, players from a PL club explained that unless they were prepared to play with pain and injury, they were simply 'ignored':

4. The coaches, they ignore you.
  3. They palm you off.
  4. Like they don't say a word to you. They pretend you are not even there.
  7. They won't talk to you, only the physio's will deal with you.
- Q. Why do you think that is?
5. Sometimes they just think you are on a jolly up.
  3. Yeah yeah. Sometimes they think 'He ain't really injured, he just don't want to train'.
  1. Some of the coaches, when they were back playing, think that they should just be like soldiers and carry on and play through it.
- (Year 1, Club 20)

Players at another PL club went on to say that part of the process of being ignored was the tendency for injured players to be isolated from teammates and undertake different routines from them. The deliberate policy of inconveniencing and isolating players (Roderick, 2006) who were perceived as useless to managers was described by two players from a PL club who were injured at the time:

1. I haven't had a day off in like five weeks, not even on the Sunday or anything and it's so long.
- Q. Why's that?
1. 'Cos I'm injured. But I think we should be allowed a day off even if we're injured because like it's mentally draining ...
  4. It's quite weird like, they don't treat you basically the same as if they would as if you were playing on a Saturday.
- Q. Why is that do you reckon?
1. Managers don't like you when you're injured.
  4. Yeah, you're not really no good to them.
- (Year 2, Club 9)

Being isolated came to impact negatively on players' emotional and psychological well-being and many of them claimed that, when injured, they never felt part of the team and were forgotten about; they had become the 'socially dead' (Goffman, 1963). When asked about their personal experiences of being injured and stigmatized for not being able to play, a group of players from a Championship club said:

2. Everyone has been injured.
  - Q. What is that like?
  2. Shit.
  7. It is probably the worst thing.
  5. Because you are out of the frame, and everyone basically blocks you out. There's no special treatment.
  4. You don't feel part of the team anymore. You are not training, not playing.
  5. They forget about you.
  - Q. Who forgets about you?
  3. Gaffer.
  4. Yeah, sometimes you won't have to travel. He's like 'You don't have to travel'.
  7. You are just not, you just don't feel like part of the team. You are not training. You are not playing. You are just indoor all the time.
  - ...
  4. Like you are not part of the team really.
- (Year 2, Club 14)

Whilst getting the 'cold shoulder' from coaches had a significant impact on players' experiences of the isolation they reported, spending time in the physio room, or in the gym when their teammates were out training, exacerbated their feelings of being cut-off from the camaraderie and 'banter' that characterized time with 'the boys'. As players from another Championship club put it:

3. You're not under pressure from the manager but you wanna get back and sometimes you rush it because you know, just 'cos you wanna get back into it.
  5. But you wanna do.
  - Q. Why is it that?
  6. Just to get back playing.
  3. You've had enough of being in physio.
  6. And not being with the boys.
- (Year 2, Club 19)

Alongside not being able to impress upon their coach or manager their ability as a player, the isolation they endured was, for all the players in the study, the worst part of being injured. As noted earlier, banter and camaraderie among players played a central role in the way they

constructed their identity and present their preferred self-identities, and being away from that was difficult for the players to deal with. Indeed, because of the requirements that players will work on their own in the gym or with the physiotherapist, players seemed to ‘develop a sense of isolation from what are for them meaningful networks of social relationships’ (Roderick, 2006, p. 79). Simultaneously, by many of the coaches and managers, players who were injured were categorized as ‘non-producers’ (Roderick, 2006) and, therefore, being unable to contribute to the performance of the team limited the ‘possibility for players to construct alternative valued self-images and relegate[d] them to a marginal position in relation to the club’s central activity’ (Roderick, 2006, p. 78-9). When injured, players’ conception of the sense of ‘self’ (Blumer, 1969) intensified the need for them to return as soon as possible, as did the fact that, for the majority of the players, they only had two years to impress upon those charged with awarding professional contracts that they were able to play at the professional level of the game as the following section examines.

*‘You’ve only got two years’: players’ short-term careers*

Among the other significant reasons why players in this study did not like being injured and always endeavoured to play, wherever possible, was the relatively short time (two years) they perceived as having to complete their scholarship or apprenticeship. It was indicative of their short-term perspective that many players brought to bear on their experiences that they typically ignored the long-term consequences to their health and self-identities of playing with pain and injury in favour of adopting a more pragmatic approach where they did all they needed to in order to gain a professional contract at the age of 18. Indeed, for all players, spending time away from training and matches because they were injured meant they had less time available to impress those responsible for deciding who will be awarded a professional contract. This was a particularly pertinent point for any player who was commanding a

starting spot in the team at the point at which they became injured. All of the players recognized the importance of keeping their starting place if they had been chosen by the manager and the consequences of another player taking their place should they subsequently play well. Players from a League Two club described the dilemmas they faced in this regard as follows:

5. If you've got a starting spot, you wanna be staying in that team.
  2. As soon as you lose your spot in that team, you won't be able to get back in.
  1. Or, if you haven't got a starting spot, you wanna get in the team.
  2. You've only got 2 years at the end of the day to get a pro, and you don't wanna spend half of it out injured. That's half your chance gone.
- Q. Even if you might be doing long-term damage?
1. Yeah.
  2. I think some people would, but obviously, if you don't know what you've got, you won't know if you're making it worse.
- (Year 1, Club 21)

The importance of avoiding injury and securing 'game time' to impress the manager was expressed particularly clearly by players who were in the second year of the ASE programme. For a number of reasons, such as seeing their predecessors being released or being frequently reminded by the staff of the importance of their final year, second year players at each club were especially sensitive to the impact spending time away from training and matches may have on their ability to secure a professional contract. Whilst Brown and Potrac (2009) found that the loss of identity players encountered when they were released (or deselected) was something that occurred rather suddenly, many of the players in this study recognized that, if they were not in the team in their final year, 'the writing was on the wall' for them in terms of being released and the process of disengaging with football had begun. Many of the second year players in the study responded in a similar way to the following group of Championship players when asked about playing with pain and injury:

- 6. It's your last year innit? You've got to impress.
  - 2. Yeah, you've got to.
  - 1. You've got to impress.
  - 3. You can't pull out with an injury like that 'cos you could play through it.
  - 2. That one game you miss, that weekend could be the game you impress and that could make their mind up.
- (Year 2, Club 13)

Another group of players also from the Championship similarly claimed that:

- 4. You just wanna be on the pitch.
  - 2. Just as a footballer, it's the last thing you wanna be [injured].
  - 4. It takes a while to get back and with this being the most important year as well like.
- Q. This is the most important year because?
- 4. Contract like.
  - 2. They make a decision at the end of the year.
- (Year 2, Club 19)

The perceived short-term nature of a scholarship or apprenticeship, together with the value young players placed on gaining a professional contract during their second year, resulted in players further compromising their welfare, especially when it came to playing with pain and injury. As noted earlier, while playing with pain and injury was something often admired by coaches and managers because it 'showed character', not playing on a regular basis because of injury was seen as an inconvenience and a personal weakness of the player (Roderick, 2006; Roderick *et al.*, 2000). In their second year, typically when players were expected to play regularly in the youth team, all players understood that missing games was detrimental to achieving their goal of gaining a full-time professional contract.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, it has been argued that the power differentials that exist between players and other members of their interdependency networks play an important part in impacting on their welfare and experiences those players have of life in an Academy or CoE. Among other things players were routinely confronted with the need to sustain their self-identities (Blumer, 1969; Goffman, 1963), and negotiate the constraints generated by their relational networks (Elias, 1978) to present an appropriate self. These data suggest that young players in Academies and CoE perceive themselves as 'at the bottom of the club' and this perception it seems is only enhanced by the behaviours of those people around them. Whether informal processes such as banter and verbal forms of social control, or through more formal ones like the treatment of injuries and the requirement to undertake jobs, players were continually reminded of their status via the imposition of stigma (Goffman, 1963) and group disgrace (Elias & Scotson, 1994) if they failed to demonstrate they had a good attitude to significant others. The significance of players' figurations for how they thought and acted also found expression in the culture of mistrust and suspicion that players experienced, and the expectation that any revelations of personal matters that impacted on their welfare were to be avoided for fear of being stigmatized. This is a theme that will be returned to in the Conclusion.

## Conclusion

The central objective of this thesis has been to explore the realities of young footballers' day-to-day working-lives and the experiences they have of the educational programmes they follow, and the welfare-related matters that arise, within present-day Academies and CoE. More particularly, by drawing upon the figurational sociology of Elias, concepts derived from symbolic interactionism, and existing work in the sociology of youth, the study set out to make more adequate sociological sense of young players' views and experiences of education and other welfare issues by locating these within the social networks of interdependencies in which players are bound up. On the basis of self-completion questionnaires and focus groups conducted with 303 players from 21 clubs in England and Wales, the findings of the study suggested that, as Parker (1996) observed in the early 1990s, players were socialized into a largely anti-academic culture that has traditionally underpinned the world of professional football, and in which the demonstration of a 'good attitude' (Roderick, 2006) and commitment to the more central members of players' interdependencies (especially coaches and managers) dominated all other concerns.

It was also clear from players' testimonies that whilst, on a formal level, age 16 marked the beginning of their pursuit of a professional contract, in practice this was a process the roots of which could be traced back to their early childhood. Thus, it was not sociologically surprising to find that many of the players in this study indicated how, having been successfully obtained a scholarship or apprenticeship, they invariably placed much greater emphasis on gaining a professional contract than any form of compulsory educational qualification which is made available on the ASE programme. Invariably, it was well understood by all players that the pursuit of an educational qualification, such as the BTEC or NVQ, was at best seen



as a ‘back-up plan’ should they not ‘make it’ in realizing their dream as a professional footballer. Indeed, by the time players had begun the ASE programme many of them had already developed individual and group habituses – at the social and psychological levels (Dunning, 1999; Elias, 2001) – in which they had become predisposed towards viewing adult-led forms of education with some hostility and criticism. The longstanding antipathy many players expressed towards the process of academic learning and schooling meant they engaged, intentionally and in largely unplanned ways, in the perpetuation of a ‘counter-school culture’ that constrained players away from engaging in the educational components of the ASE programme more than they may have liked (Willis, 2009 [1978]). This is not to say, however, that all players necessarily viewed education as ‘a metaphor for occupational failure’ (Parker, 1996). For some players, they were happy to discuss their educational ambitions with other players, and to reflect upon their potential entry to higher education at a later date, as many other young people now do as they negotiate the youth to young adulthood life-stage (Furlong & Cartmel, 2007; Roberts, 1996).

But how might we adequately account for players’ views of education which, of course, contain important ideological elements? The broad answer to this question appeared to lie in the structure of the figurations in which players were located and, in particular, in the ways in which these figurations have constrained their views and experiences of football in Academies or CoE. The constraints to which players were subject, and which influenced why they think the way they do about the educational components of the ASE programme, were both internal and external (Elias, 1978; Goudsblom, 1977). The players’ internalized constraints were traceable to their habitus and life experiences, particularly their emotional ties and identification with football. Given these internalized experiences and deeply rooted attachments to football that formed a central aspect of their personal biographies, habituses

(Dunning, 1999; Elias, 2001) and professional socialization (McGillivray *et al.*, 2005; Parker, 1996; Roderick, 2006), many indicated that they were prepared to make the necessary ‘sacrifices’ reviewed in Chapter Six to maximize their chances of being awarded a professional contract at the end of the two-year programme.

It was also clear that players were also increasingly subjected to external constraints arising from the increasing complexity of the figurations of which they are a part (Elias, 1978; Mennell & Goudsblom, 1998), and which characterized their experiences of football in their respective clubs. In particular, it was clear that the deep-seated values players held in relation to the professional game, and often negative attitudes many held towards education, were shaped by members of the more central interdependencies (e.g. parents, teachers, friends) into which they were born and had been developed during the more impressionable phases of childhood and youth (Elias, 1978). For reasons explained in Chapter Five, it was clear that the perception among the players in this study reinforced the view that club management also did not generally value education as much as their footballing concerns (Cushion & Jones, 2006, 2012; Parker, 1996). To be seen as paying too much attention to the educational component of their time in an Academy or CoE meant players were almost always at risk of being stigmatized or discredited (Goffman, 1963) as someone who is not dedicated to gaining a full-time contract at a professional club. In other words, if during the process of interaction players were thought to be paying too much attention to gaining educational qualifications, their coaches and managers, as the generally more powerful groups in their figurations, often interpreted that as an indication that the player had begun to ‘given up’ on their chances of gaining a professional contract. In doing so, players were constrained to downplay the significance of education in their lives, regardless of the extent to which they may or may not have valued it.

To adequately understand players' views and experiences of education and welfare, therefore, one must also understand the role coaches and managers play in the lives of young players. When they become a full-time employee aged 16, players are continually expected to orientate themselves within their figurations (Elias, 1978) and engage in a whole series of 'impression management' techniques, or 'face work' (Goffman, 1959), in the hope of convincing the coach or manager of his worth as a prospective professional. Central among the ways in which players endeavoured to impress significant others were, as noted in Chapter Four, avoiding the impression that they were 'big time', working hard on and off the field of play, accepting without question the authoritarian and disciplinary techniques club staff adopted to control their behaviour, and being prepared to accept the more-or-less explicit rules that underpin the regular use of 'banter' or joking.

It was also clear that whilst the appointment of EWOs is intended to safeguard the welfare of players, almost all players viewed them with a strong degree of suspicion and an obvious degree of mistrust characterized the relationship that they had with EWOs, like other members of club staff. This came to impact negatively on the confidence with which players felt able to discuss sensitive issues with club management, for they feared that these matters would 'get back' to others inside the club, which was generally viewed as being anything other than a setting in which the disclosure of private information could be managed confidentially. This was exacerbated, in almost all cases, by players' observations that they were treated as if they were 'bottom of the club' and whose welfare needs were not generally well understood.

## **Policy implications of the findings**

The findings of this study suggest that for those with an interest in enhancing the educational and welfare provisions currently available to players in Academies and CoE, it is important to appreciate that the efficacy of those strategies in bringing about desired change in young people's lives may be significantly constrained by the prevailing subcultures and values that surround the sport. The lengthening and growing complexity of the networks of interdependencies that is coming increasingly to characterize the professional game in England and Wales also means that enhancing the education and welfare needs of players in clubs would require policy-makers to obtain a significant degree of co-operation from various groups, including: players, coaches, managers, sponsors, governing bodies and officials. This is, of course, particularly problematic, for the extent to which those groups are differentially committed to safeguarding the interests of players above other concerns, will play an important part in determining the extent to which policy-makers and other interested parties will be able to achieve their desired ends in relation to the education and welfare of young footballers.

It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that any proposed reforms and recommendations to the education and welfare provisions that are currently available in Academies and CoE will require those involved in their development and implementation to gain a deeper understanding of the figurations characteristic of professional football, and the extent to which the priorities of key actors are likely to be unsympathetic to a greater concern with the welfare and educational interests of young players. This awareness is not only fundamental to an appreciation of the relational impediments to effective policy-making, but may also help provide an indication of what is realistic in terms of policy change, at least within football in

England and Wales. The data reported in this study also suggest that an examination of the lengthening and increasingly complex networks of interdependencies, which characterize Academies and CoE, would sensitize us to the deeply entrenched anti-academic traditions that underpin the culture of professional football. It would also alert policy-makers to the fact that, for many within football Academies or CoE, the need to be as successful on the field of play far outweighs the requirement to improve education and welfare provision. Finally, and of particular importance to the present study, a sensitivity to the culture of professional football may also advance understanding of the ways in which many young players may fail to ‘see further than their guaranteed period of employment, and as such fail to consider there [sic] future prospects’ or education and welfare, and ‘that football clubs may employ apprentices with little or no intention of offering them a professional contract at the end of their ... programme’ (Parker, 1995, p. 117). Whether these scenarios are seen as a good or bad thing depends entirely on one’s own preferred ideological view of the future of youth football in Academies and CoE.

### **Areas in need of further research**

As noted in the Introduction to this thesis, it is surprising for such a high profile and much written about sport that so little social scientific research exists on professional football and young players’ experiences of the game. This is typically related to the difficulties associated with accessing the closed social world of professional football clubs (Brackenridge, 2007; Roderick, 2006). If, as this study has attempted to demonstrate, researchers who are able to access and deal with clubs in a mutually cooperative and sympathetic way are more likely to generate further research that may help provide more object-adequate explanations of the lives of young footballers ‘in the round’. In building on the data reported here, future studies

may wish to explore the utility of incorporating longitudinal research designs to follow-up players who may be released from their contracts early, but especially when aged 18, to understand better their career trajectories once they leave an Academy or CoE, for this is a not well understood area in the sociology of football. It might also be suggested that future research seeks to compare the situations of young footballers to those in other occupational domains (e.g. law, ballet, and music) that are also thought to have similarly high attrition rates among young people. A final area of research that scholars with an interest in youth football may wish to consider is how the recently introduced *Elite Player Performance Plan*, will come to impact on the ways Academies and CoE operate in the future, and above all on the day-to-day realities of the lives of young players which is all too often forgotten in analyses of the so-called ‘beautiful game’.

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## **Appendices**

## **Appendix 1**

### **Self-Completion Questionnaire**

## **Appendix 2**

### **Focus Group Schedule**

## **Focus Group Schedule Outline**

### **Life at an Academy/Centre of Excellence**

- Why did you decide to pursue a career in professional football?
- What is it like to be a player at ....?
- Can you describe a typical day from when you wake-up to when you leave the Academy/Centre of Excellence?
- Have you played for other clubs?
- What is the difference between here and other clubs you have played for?
- Do any of you do extra training on your own, in your time away from the Academy/Centre of Excellence?

### **Coaches and others at the Academy/Centre of Excellence**

- What are your opinions of the coaches at the Academy/Centre of Excellence?
- How would you describe your relationship with your coach?
- What do they expect of you?
- How do the coaches react when you win or lose? How do you react to this behaviour? Would you rather they do something different? What?
- Have you ever been asked to do something that you didn't want to do?
- Do you feel that the coaches are approachable, for example, if you had a problem or issue you needed to discuss with them?
- How do you think you get on as a group?
- As apprentice players, do you interact with players who have signed full professional contracts?
- What is your relationship with the first team manager like?
- Where does this interaction take place?
- What are your opinions of the professional players at the club?
- What do you think their opinion is of you as apprentices?

### **Education and welfare**

- What did you want to do when you were at school? Did you simply want to be a footballer or did you think about other professions as well?
- What sort of Education do you do as part of your life at an Academy/Centre of Excellence? For example, what qualifications are you studying for?
- Where does this education take place?
- If you go offsite to study (e.g, to a college), what is the time like when you are at college? Are you taught separately or in other classes?
- How do other students view you? What are your opinions of others at college?
- What involvement do you have with the Education and Welfare officer at the Academy/Centre of Excellence?
- What are your opinions of the education and welfare officer?

- What aspects of the education you receive do you enjoy and which aspects do you dislike? Why?
- What are your opinions of the education you receive at the Academy/Centre of Excellence?
- Where do you rank education in order of your priorities?
- Do any of you do any educational courses away from the Academy/Centre of Excellence?
- Why do/don't you undertake any more? Have you thought about this?
- Do you have homework to do? How many hours a week do you have?
- Are matches ever scheduled for when you are at college or studying for your qualifications? If so, do you miss the matches or the classes? What is your opinion of missing classes/matches?
- What do the education and welfare officers expect of you?
- What do you think you will be if you do not make it as a professional footballer?
- What are the coaches opinions of the education you receive?  
Do they ever discuss your education?

### **Life away from the academy**

- What are your mates opinions of you being an apprentice?
- How do you think your life has changed since you became an apprentice at ..... Football Club?
- What are your parent opinions of you being a professional footballer?
- Are your parents supportive, if at all, of your chosen career path? If so, in what way?
- Why do you think your parents are of this opinion about your chosen career path?  
To what extent, if at all, do your parents show an interest in your education?
- What are your friends opinions of the fact that you are an apprentice at a professional football club?
- Has the way your friends treat you changed since you were signed as an apprentice at a professional football club?
- What sort of activities do you do in your spare time?
- Where do you tend to do these activities and who with?
- Whom would you approach, if anybody, should you have a problem or issue you needed to discuss?
- If you had the opportunity to change anything about the Academy/Centre of Excellence, what would it be?